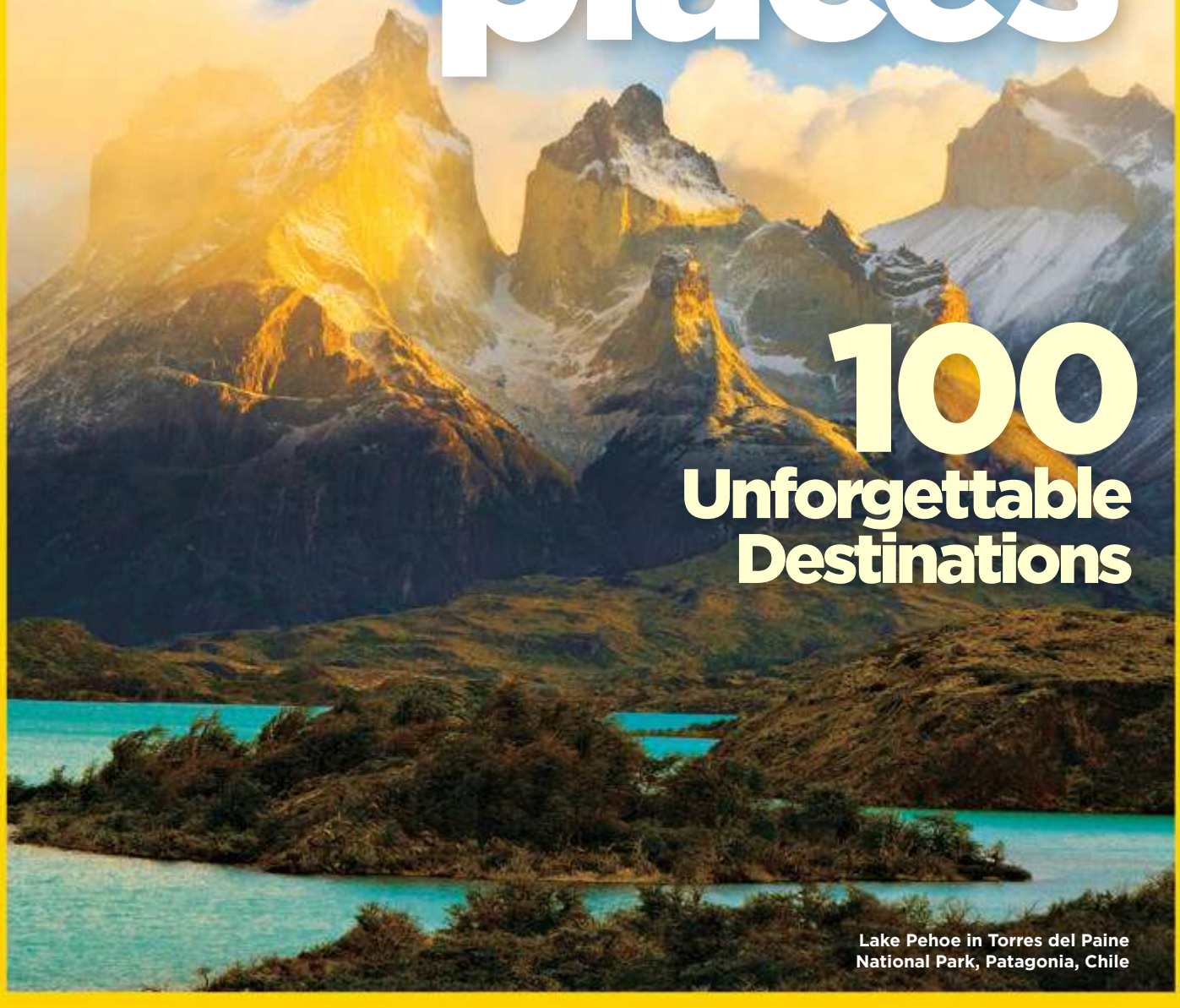
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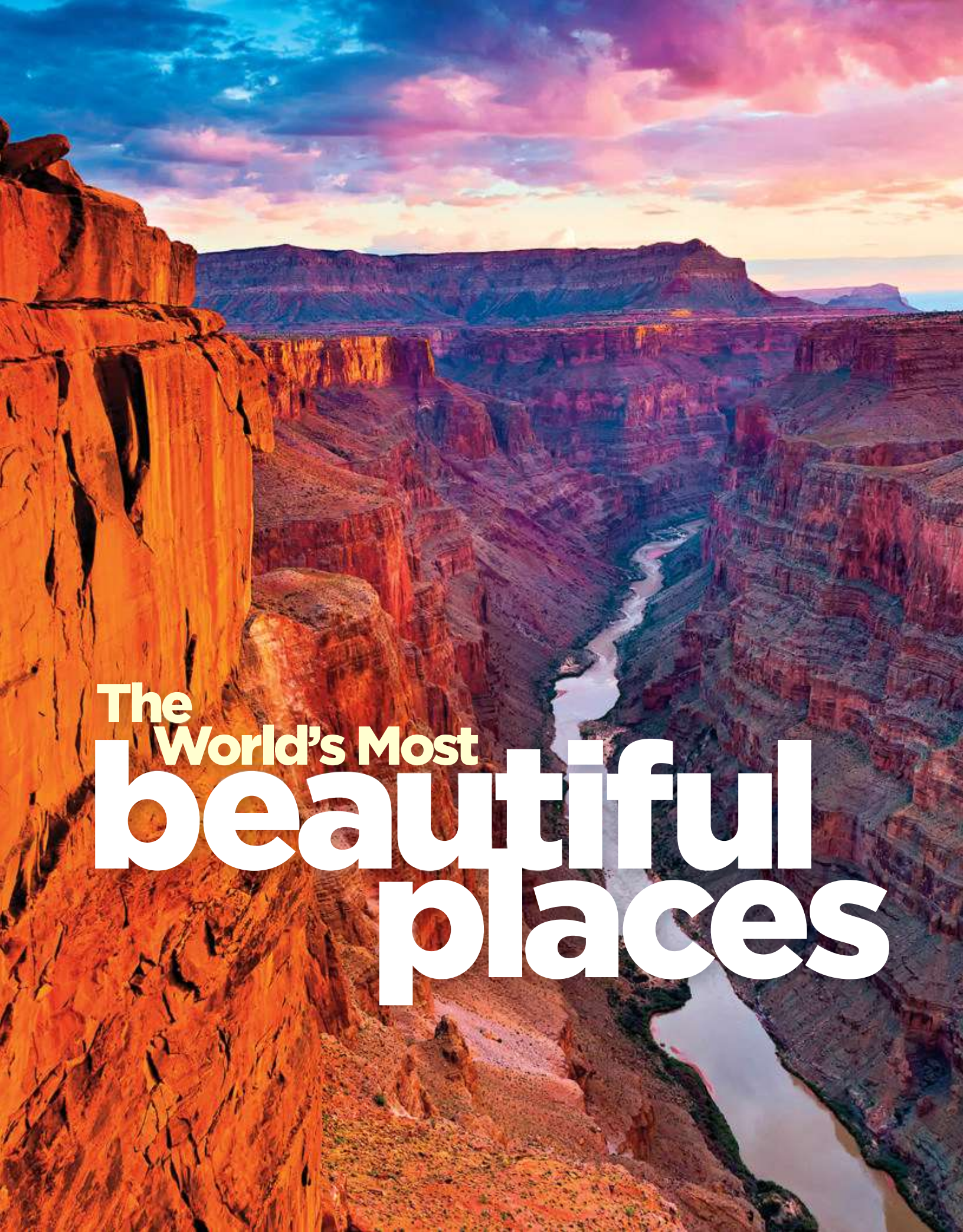
Stunning landscapes
Breathtaking vistas
Awe-inspiring getaways

The World's Most beautiful places

100 Unforgettable Destinations

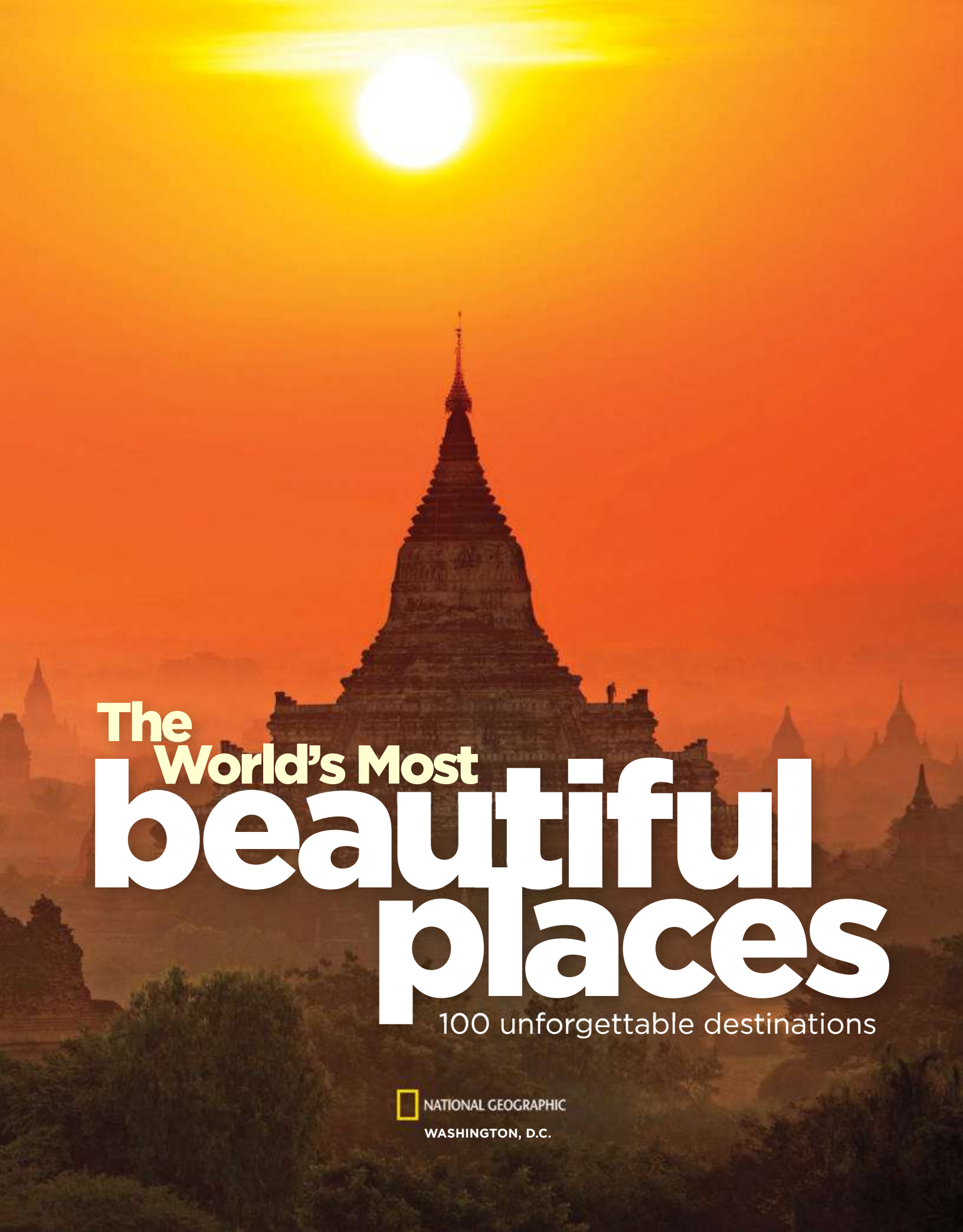


Lake Pehoe in Torres del Paine National Park, Patagonia, Chile



The World's Most beautiful places





The World's Most beautiful places

100 unforgettable destinations

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC
WASHINGTON, D.C.



Page 1: The setting sun lights the walls at Toroweap Point on the rim of the Grand Canyon. Pages 2–3: The Shwesandaw Pagoda temple at sunrise in Bagan. This page: A beachcomber strolls across the sands at Frégate Island in the Seychelles.

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Illustrations Credits 128

The World's Most beautiful places

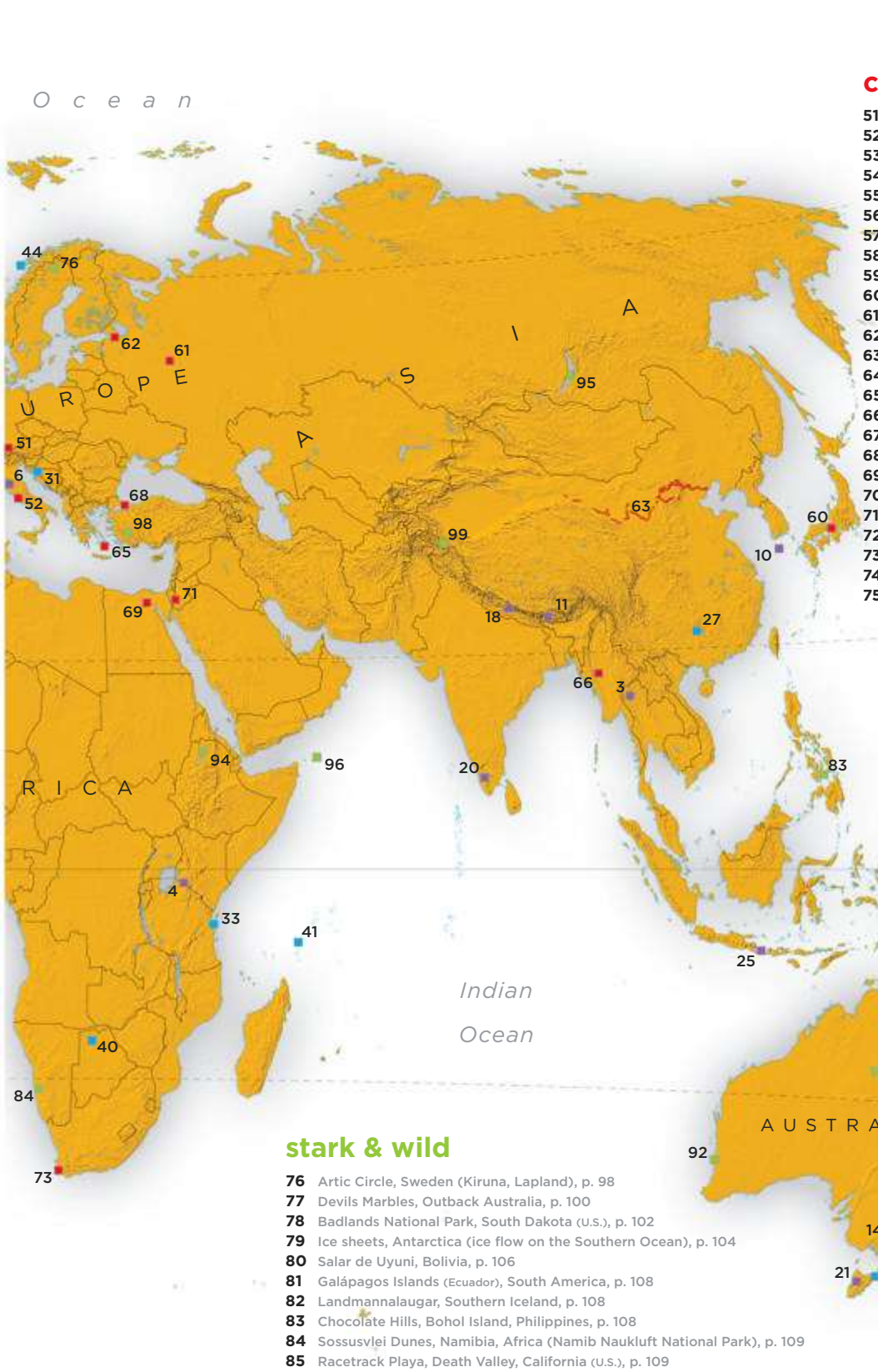
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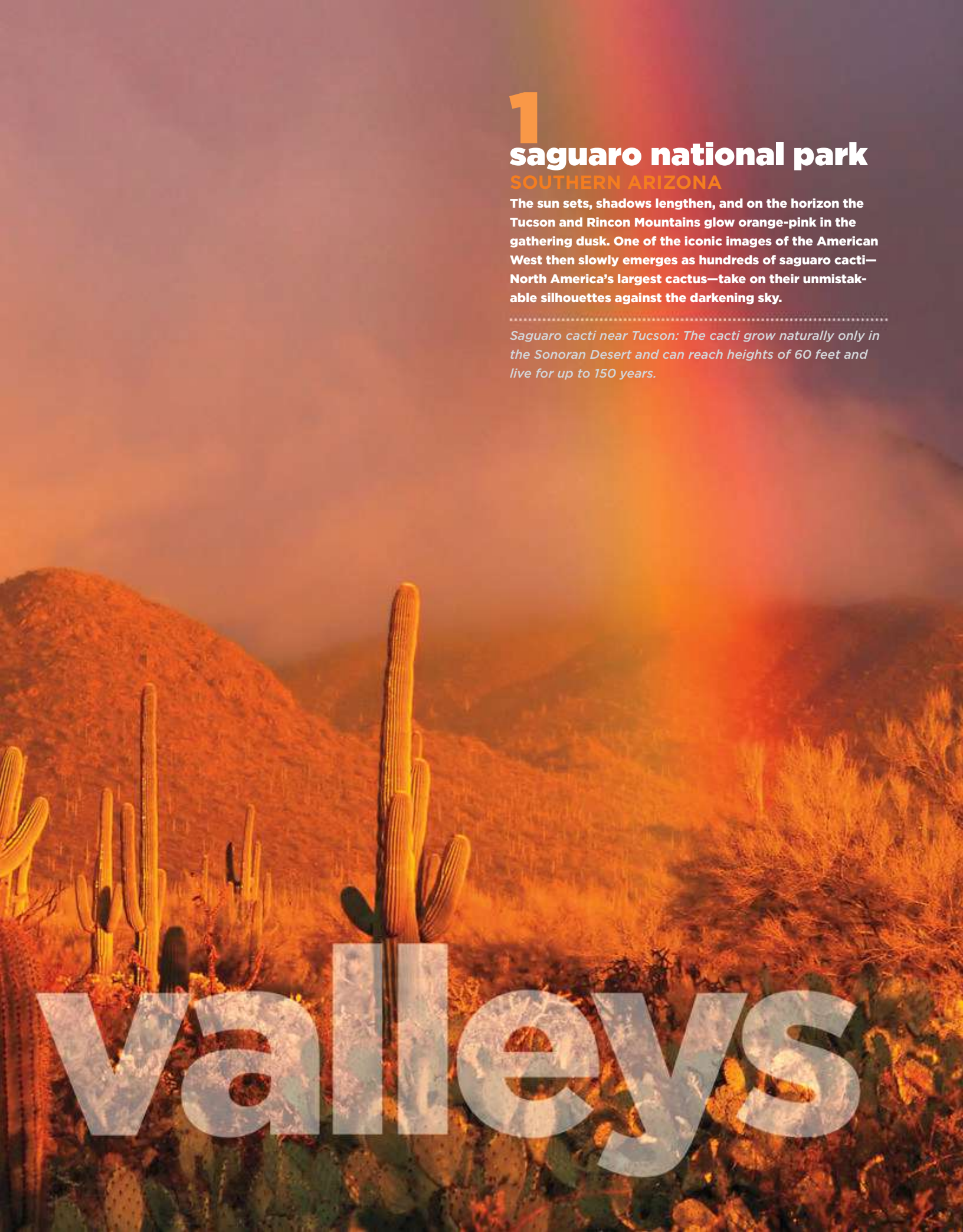

peaks&

1 saguaro national park

SOUTHERN ARIZONA

The sun sets, shadows lengthen, and on the horizon the Tucson and Rincon Mountains glow orange-pink in the gathering dusk. One of the iconic images of the American West then slowly emerges as hundreds of saguaro cacti—North America's largest cactus—take on their unmistakable silhouettes against the darkening sky.

Saguaro cacti near Tucson: The cacti grow naturally only in the Sonoran Desert and can reach heights of 60 feet and live for up to 150 years.



valleys

"Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. The winds will blow their own freshness into you, and the storms their energy, while cares will drop off like autumn leaves." John Muir

In the collection of unique and iconic places contained within these pages, the notion that beauty is in the eye of the beholder is disproved. We may experience different feelings as we stand before the Grand Canyon, Machu Picchu, or Rome's eternal ruins, but some strand links them and their power to inspire. Sometimes we can look and know. Sometimes we simply recognize a place for what it is—one of the most beautiful places on Earth.

We start with the world's great peaks, which inspire great awe; no wonder we have long been drawn to them. To gaze on the majesty of Alaska's Mount McKinley or the great Himalayan summits that ring Nepal's Annapurna Sanctuary is to understand why the ancients and our elders reserved the highest places for their gods. To hike, climb, or look on the world's mountains is to escape our earthbound lives.

Valleys are different. Their beauty still inspires awe—as in the immense savanna of Kenya's Masai Mara or among the cliffs and rocky amphitheaters of America's Bryce Canyon—but often valleys are places of habitation whose gentler beauty owes something to a human touch, such as the vineyards and olive groves of Tuscany or the emerald patchwork of paddy fields across the lowlands of northern Thailand.

The spaces between the realms of peak and valley offer up resplendent landscapes of infinite variety, from the verdant rain forests of Bali and wildflower meadows of Montana's Glacier National Park to the glittering turquoise lakes of Patagonia's high plateaus and New England's dulcet hills and villages, whose blaze of autumnal color reminds us that beauty need not be in thrall to the seasons.

2 redwood national park

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

Big is beautiful when it comes to coast redwoods *(Sequoia sempervirens),* and they don't come much bigger than in Redwood National Park, which protects a precious relic forest—some 45 percent of all surviving coast redwood habitat—whose 350-foot-tall, 2,000-year-old trees are among the world's oldest and tallest living organisms.

DON'T MISS

The 32-mile Avenue of the Giants (Route 254) gives access to the region's finest forest and the world's largest surviving stand of virgin redwoods.

Redwoods reach for the sky in Redwood National Park, part of an ecosystem that is 160 million years old.





3 chiang mai province

NORTHERN THAILAND

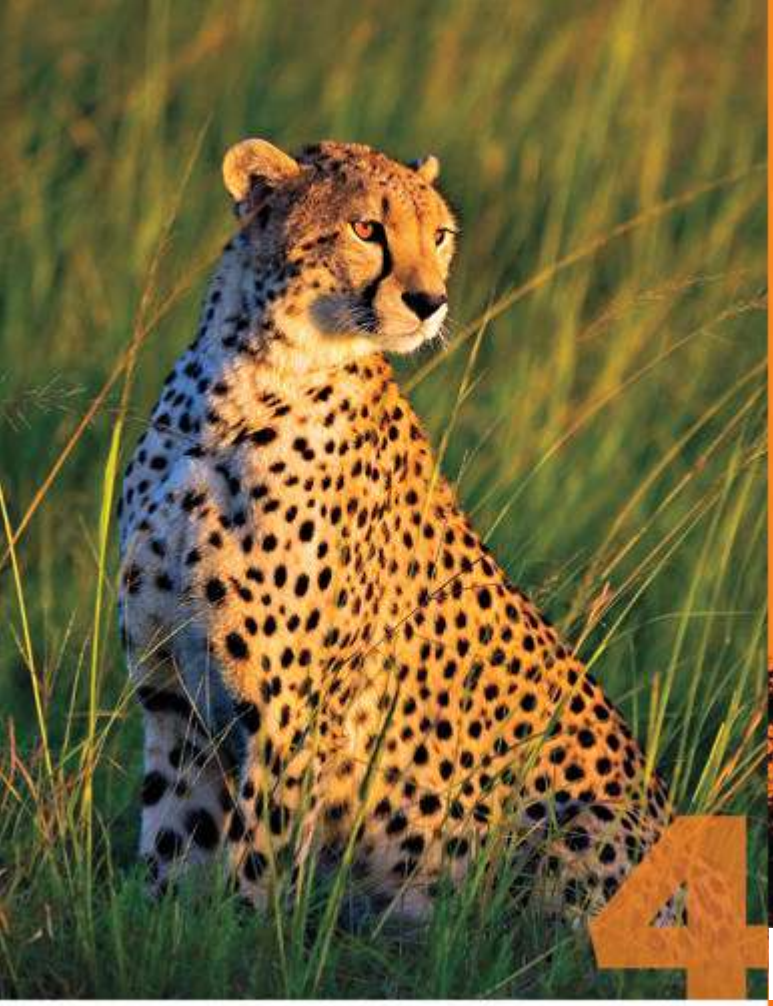
The landscapes of Chiang Mai are as varied as the many peoples that have long been drawn to this area of Thailand, one of Southeast Asia's most important historical crossroads. Paddy fields fill the lowlands and sinuous hillside terraces with a vivid patchwork of jade and emerald. Encroaching on all sides is the darker, denser green of jungle, laced with slow-flowing rivers and shadowed by mountains like Doi Inthanon (8,415 ft/2,565 m) and Doi Chiang Dao (7,136 ft/2,175 m), two of the country's highest peaks.

DON'T MISS

The region's capital, Chiang Mai, has a moated old town that has retained its charm and is a base for excursions to out-of-the-way tribal villages and for cycling, hiking, elephant trekking, bird-watching, and rafting trips in the surrounding backcountry.

Paddy fields near Chiang Mai; about half of Thailand's arable land is given over to rice production.





masai mara national reserve

SOUTHWESTERN KENYA

When the sun sets in the Masai Mara National Reserve, Africa's vast skies fill with stars as the tree-dotted grasslands and low escarpments of the savanna below are bathed in a gentle golden glow. Shadows gather and the dry, searing heat of the day gives way to the balmy stillness of twilight, a cooling calm before the storm of evening activity erupts among many of the thousands of creatures—lions, leopards, elephants, rhinoceros, hyenas, and more—that call this corner of southwestern Kenya home.

DON'T MISS

Visit the Masai Mara in August, when 1.2 million wildebeests, 750,000 zebras, and other animals driven north by drought arrive in the region during the "Great Migration" from the Serengeti plains of neighboring Tanzania.

Sunset over the Masai Mara (right) and a cheetah (above), which likes to hunt when the sun is low





5 torres del paine

PATAGONIA, CHILE

Yes, they are *torres*—towers—but no human-made tower has the awe-inspiring grandeur of the vast, soaring granite monoliths at the heart of the Torres del Paine massif. Yet this great easterly spur of the Andes, protected by a 935-square-mile (2,422 sq km) national park, offers far more than skyscraping spires and pinnacles. Trails wend through pine-scented forest, past emerald lakes, and across windswept plains to the fringes of the Grey, Dickson, and other glaciers of the Southern Patagonian Ice Field.

DON'T MISS

Day hikes on good, marked trails offer views of the Paine's celebrated pinnacles. Hikers can follow the famous "W" trail through the mountains in five days, staying at *refugios,* or make a full circuit of the massif in eight or nine days.

Sunrise casts the granite spires and rock walls of Patagonia's Paine massif in a golden glow.





6 tuscany

CENTRAL ITALY

Tuscany is blessed, even by Italy's high standards. In Florence, it has Europe's greatest Renaissance city, and in Siena, its most perfect medieval town. Hilltop villages look much as they have for centuries, and the timeless landscapes, worked over millennia, are a tapestry of vineyards, age-old olive groves, cypress-topped hills, rustic farmhouses, and fields of wheat and summer sunflowers. Visitors gorged on art and scenery can feast on the region's sublime food or sample wine at a profusion of wineries.

DON'T MISS

The Val d'Orcia (Orcia Valley), south of Siena, epitomizes all that is best in Tuscany, home to pastoral landscapes and a lovely abbey—Sant'Antimo—as well as a trio of its most captivating small towns: Pienza, Montalcino, and Montepulciano.

Olives, cypresses, vineyards, and rolling hills—a classic Tuscan landscape in the Orcia Valley near Pienza





7 olympic national park

OLYMPIC PENINSULA, WASHINGTON

The U.S. National Park Service has called this picturesque expanse "three parks in one." Only three? Someone needs to recount, because few areas in North America are quite as varied. Landscape proliferates, from the wild beaches at the park's fringes, through vast tracts of old-growth rain forest dense with mossy undergrowth and fast-flowing streams, to the alpine meadows and deep-cut valleys that herald the glaciers at the park's jagged, mountainous heart.

DON'T MISS

Few roads penetrate the park's mountainous interior, but Hurricane Ridge offers accessible alpine and Nordic skiing, along with superb views of the surrounds.

Deer graze (above) on sloping fields at Hurricane Ridge in Olympic National Park; a bunchberry flower (left) nestles among ferns.





8 yosemite national park

EASTERN CALIFORNIA

Some 900,000 visitors flock to Yosemite National Park in an average July. By January, that figure has fallen to just 26,000, making winter a wonderful time to visit, not just for the lack of crowds but also for the added splendor that snow lends to the landscape and the ice-sharp clarity of the mountains on crisp, blue-skied days. Join rangers on guided snowshoe hikes, sit in a warm shuttle bus on a drive around the park, or just curl up in front of the fire at the Ahwahnee Hotel, a national historical landmark.

DON'T MISS

Some trails remain open in the Yosemite Valley in winter, and there's skiing at nearby Badger Pass. You can also skate outdoors at Curry Village in the shadow of Half Dome and Glacier Point, two of the park's most spectacular natural features.

The sun-dappled rock walls of El Capitan loom over a snowy Merced River in Yosemite National Park.



9 mount mckinley

DENALI NATIONAL PARK, ALASKA

You might come to see bears foraging in the brush or to admire the sublime mountain scenery along the 90-mile Denali Park Road, or with the hope of spotting moose and herds of caribou in the Teklanika Valley. Whatever you come to see in Denali National Park, a protected area about the size of Massachusetts, you won't want to leave without a glimpse of its majestic centerpiece: the 20,320-foot (6,196 m) Mount McKinley, the highest point in North America.

DON'T MISS

Companies in the park are licensed to take visitors dogsledding, a Denali tradition—park rangers ran dog-team patrols as far back as the 1920s. Sleds can cover 30 miles in a day, an unforgettable way to see the park's wildlife and winter vistas.

A canoe trip on Wonder Lake in Denali National Park, Alaska, with Mount McKinley in the background





10
« jeju island
SOUTH KOREA

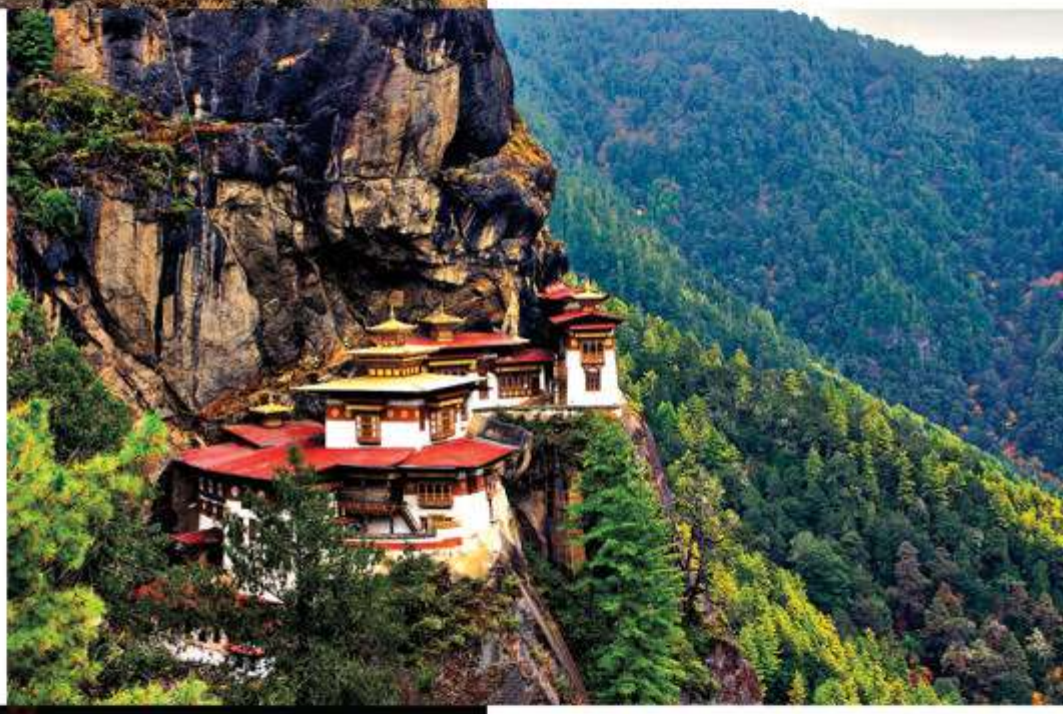
A spectacular volcano, Hallasan (6,398 ft/1,950 m), dormant for 800 years, has bequeathed Jeju many of its pristine natural features and rich habitats. These include a main crater, 360 minor craters, and a profusion of landscapes that range from black-sand beaches and waterfall-laced jungle to upland tundra and fertile lowlands that support a wealth of rare flora and fauna.

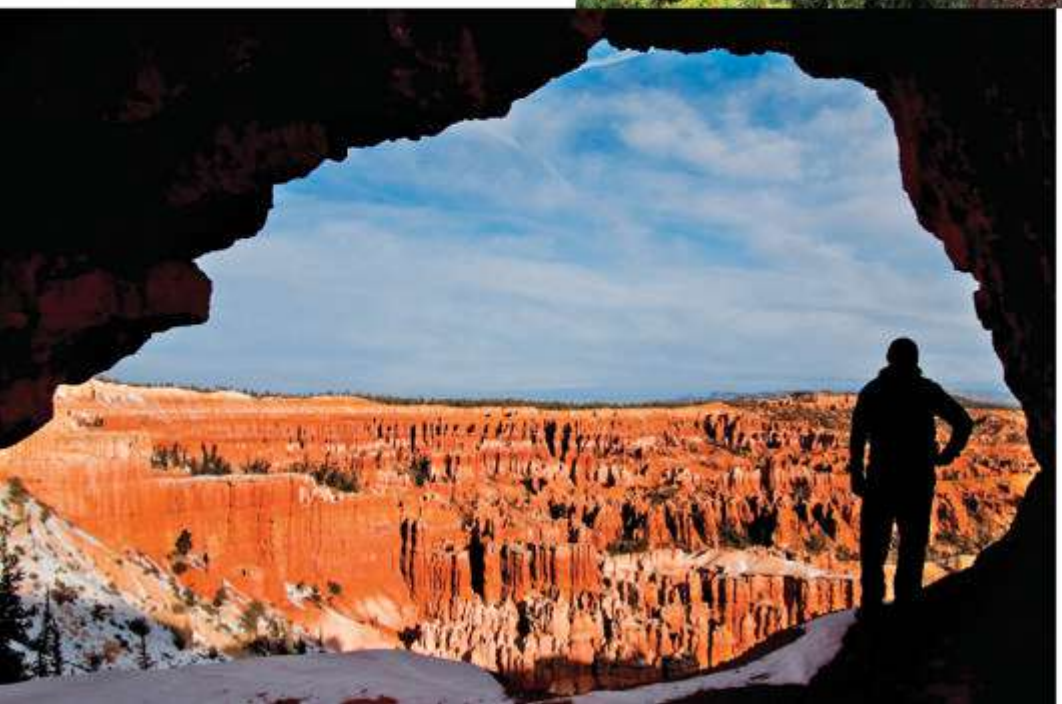
A dormant volcanic crater on Hallasan, South Korea's highest point

11
taktshang » monastery
BHUTAN

Few outsiders visit the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan, and even fewer climb to Taktshang, or the Tiger's Nest, a cliff-edge Buddhist monastery founded in the 17th century and situated at 10,236 feet (3,120 m), nestled in pristine and mist-shrouded mountains that rise above mostly untouched forests.

Taktshang Monastery, the Tiger's Nest, in remote western Bhutan





12
« bryce canyon
SOUTHWESTERN UTAH

Start with color—reds, browns, ochers—and the limestone of the Paunsaugunt Plateau. Add the power of natural erosion and the millennial work of frost, wind, and water. Then stand back and admire one of nature's most dazzling creations—the immense rock amphitheaters and rock pinnacles, or hoodoos, of Bryce Canyon.

A visitor admires sunrise over the sweep of the Bryce Amphitheater.



13 « lauterbrunnen

SWITZERLAND

Lauterbrunnen is one of the Alps' deepest valleys, guarded by the great peaks of the Eiger, Mönch, and Jungfrau. Rent a scooter and skirt past the area's velvety fields and sparkling waterfalls to the base of the Jungfrau Railway, which at 11,332 feet (3,454 m) is Europe's highest.

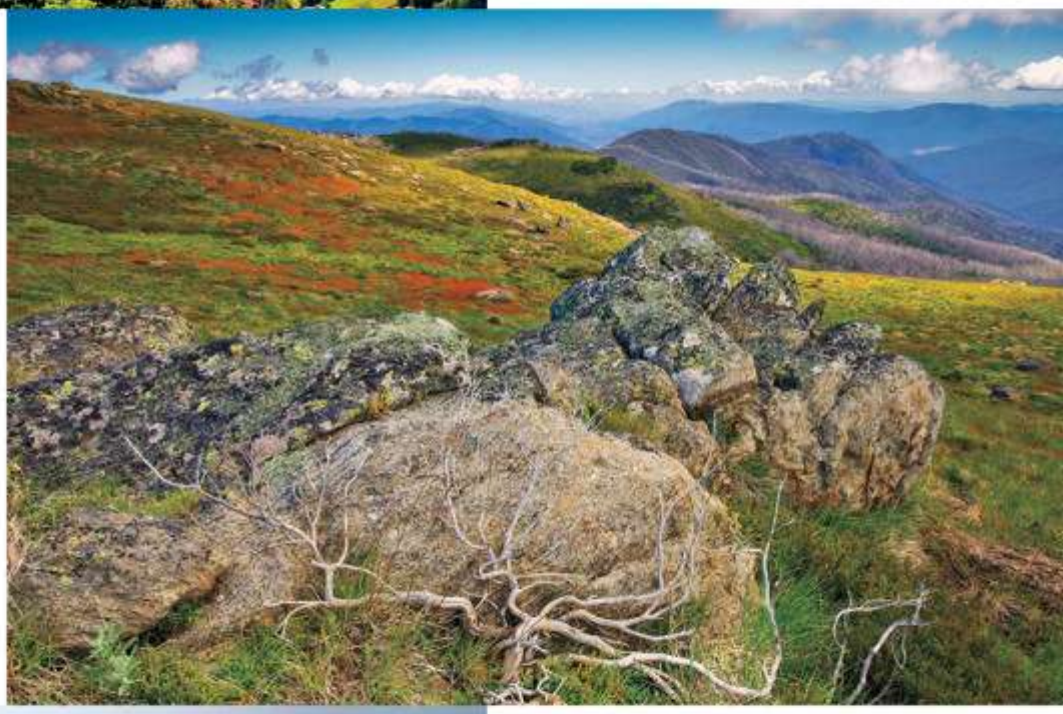
Immense rock walls soar above the meadows of the Lauterbrunnen Valley, where visitors will find pleasant cafés from which to view them.

14 alpine » national park

VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA

Sweeping mountain ridges, jagged peaks, wild rivers, snow gum forests, flower-filled meadows, and high plains grasslands—even in a country as vast and as rich in landscape as Australia, the wide-open spaces of Alpine National Park have a unique natural grandeur.

The lookout at Fainters North offers views over the sloping peaks and meadows of the Bogong High Plains.





15 « glacier national park

NORTHERN MONTANA

Scenery in the 1,583 square miles (4,100 sq km) of Glacier National Park is so magnificent that it has been called the "Crown of the Continent." Ecosystems from prairie to tundra provide habitats for many hundreds of plants and animals, while some 700 miles (1,125 km) of trails help open the area to almost two million visitors a year.

Glacier (yellow avalanche) lilies at Logan Pass in Glacier National Park



16 jasper national park

ALBERTA, CANADA

Winter, spring, summer, or fall—it makes no difference: the majesty of Jasper National Park, at the heart of the Canadian Rockies, remains undiminished. This varied and pristine landscape, which is also the largest national park in the Rockies, cries out to outdoor enthusiasts who flock here year-round to experience a wilderness of river, forest, mountain, and ice, seduced by its magnificent trails, soaring peaks, pristine powder, and crashing white water.

DON'T MISS

Drive through the finest scenery in the Canadian Rockies—past immense peaks, incredible glaciers, wildflower meadows, and iridescent lakes—on the 143-mile (230 km) Icefields Parkway from Jasper to Lake Louise.

Sun-tinged peaks and wisps of early morning mist frame Spirit Island and its reflection, captured in the waters of Jasper's Maligne Lake.





17 killarney

COUNTY KERRY, IRELAND

"It's a soft day," the Irish will say to describe a mizzling afternoon with a bit of rain. Soft days come often to Killarney, in Ireland's southwest corner, courtesy of the Atlantic and the Gulf Stream, but the result is a verdant landscape of bubbling brooks, waterfalls, and lakes framed by dulcet woods of oak and yew, lush banks of ferns, and fuchsia-tinged hedgerows. Above it all soar the steep slopes of the country's highest mountains, the magnificently named MacGillycuddy's Reeks (3,406 ft/1,038 m).

DON'T MISS

Any Irish visit must take in the *craic* (the fun), so spend an evening exploring Killarney and its old-time pubs. Then allow two days for the Ring of Kerry, a 111-mile (179 km) drive around the region's finest lakes, mountains, and monuments.

Historic monuments, such as Ross Castle outside Killarney, are a feature of County Kerry's landscapes.



18 annapurna sanctuary

NEPAL

The Annapurna Sanctuary is a magnificent mountain-ringed glacial basin situated above 13,000 feet (4,000 m) in the heart of the Himalaya. Sacred to the local Gurung people and unseen by outsiders until the 1950s, it has become a popular trekking destination, largely because it serves as the base camp for climbers tackling the peaks of the surrounding Annapurna range. But no technical skills are required for the multiday trek up to the camp, nor for the increasingly popular day hikes in and around the sanctuary.

DON'T MISS

The trek to the sanctuary climbs through ever more spectacular scenery, from the Himalayan foothills to the high mountains of the sanctuary. Stays in "teahouses" in the Annapurna Conservation Area offer insights into the daily life of Nepali villages.

Prayer flags flutter at the Annapurna base camp, one of the world's most popular trekking destinations.



19 « jotunheimen national park

BESSEGGEN, NORWAY

Vast lakes of sparkling water weave through high, wind-scoured mountain ridges in this magnificently empty, ice-carved park. Hikers tackling the region's tough but popular seven-hour Besseggen Trail will experience some of the breathtaking grandeur of a region Norwegians call the "Land of the Giants."

The view from the top of the Besseggen Trail is one of Norway's finest.

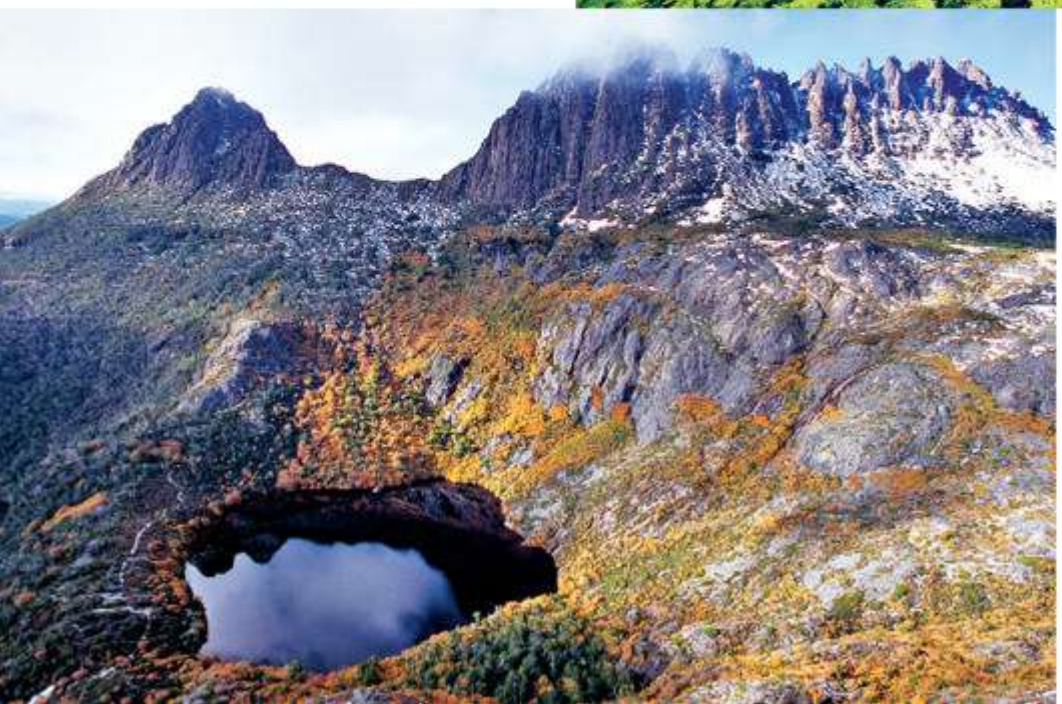
20 munnar »

WESTERN GHATS, INDIA

The Western Ghats are among the world's grandest and most diverse mountain ranges, stretching almost 1,000 miles (1,600 km) down India's western coast. At least 139 species of mammals and 508 bird species thrive here. Among the 5,000 species of flora is one that has greatly improved the lot of humankind over the millennia: *Camellia sinensis,* the tea plant, dressing the hills in vibrant greens.

Tea plantations swathe the slopes of the Western Ghats around Munnar.





21 « cradle mountain national park

TASMANIA, AUSTRALIA

Jagged peaks, ancient rain forest, beech woods, and alpine heathland make up much of Cradle Mountain's pristine wilderness, a haven for remarkable wildlife that is crisscrossed by trails such as the Overland Track, one of Australia's finest bush walks.

Beech trees cloak the slopes between Lake Wilks and Cradle Mountain.



22
« autumn in new england
CENTRAL VERMONT

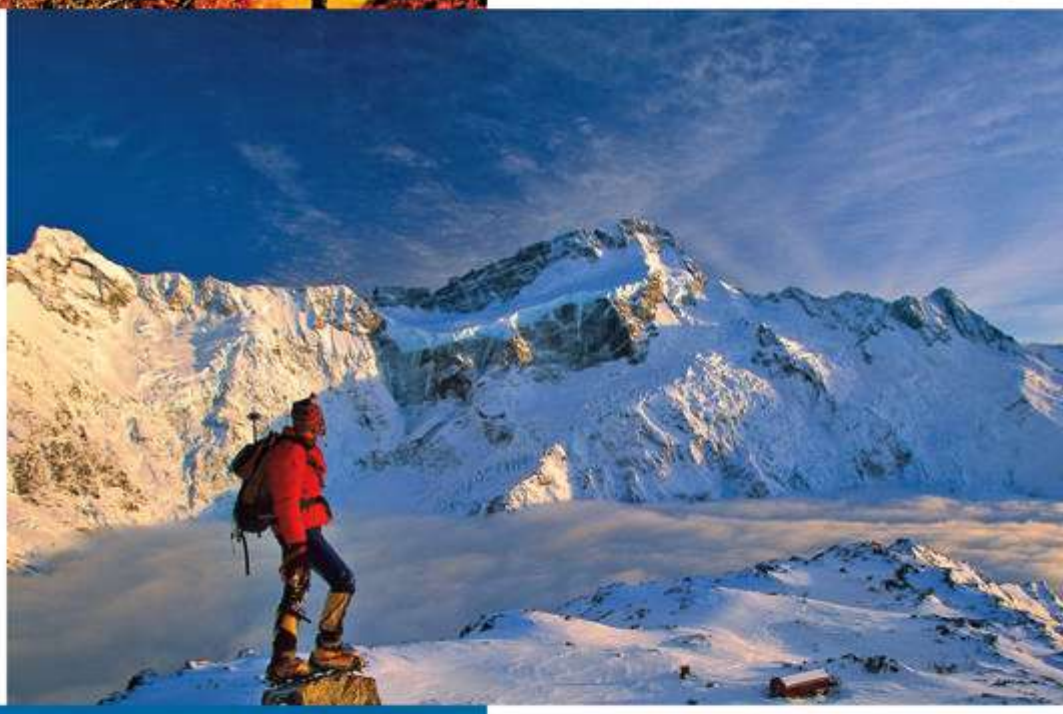
A region that is already prettier than a picture—all village greens, russet-red barns, and steepled churches—becomes prettier still as the leaves start to turn in the fall. Countless festivals celebrate this transformation, which is one of the greatest free shows on Earth.

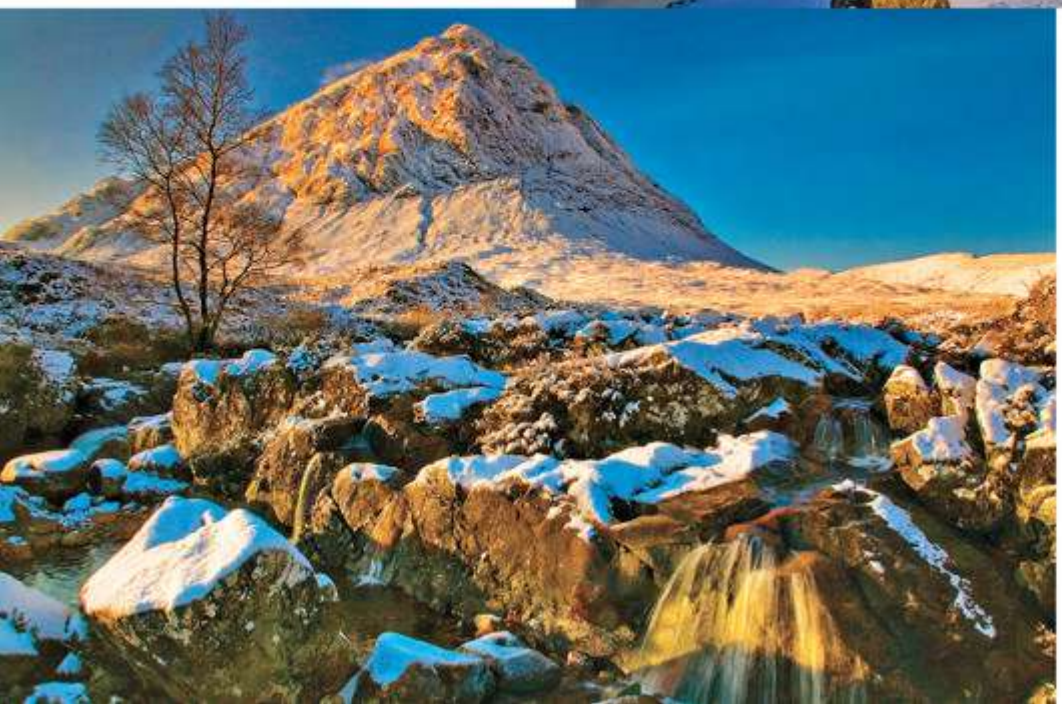
Autumn wraps New England's towns and countryside in a blaze of dazzling seasonal color.

23
aoraki/ » mount cook national park
NEW ZEALAND

All but one of New Zealand's loftiest peaks can be found in this awe-inspiring alpine park, including Aoraki, or Mount Cook (12,316 ft/3,754 m), the country's highest point. Trails to suit all abilities offer a window onto a spectacular world of ice and snow.

A climber admires the dawn view over the cloud-covered Mueller Glacier high in the Southern Alps of New Zealand.





24
« the highlands
SCOTLAND

Sun-dappled moorland, jewel-like lochs, romantic heather-covered mountains, and deep, glacier-cut glens, or valleys—many steeped in the history of clan warfare and bloody battles—make up the Highlands, the highest, wildest, and most haunting landscape in the British Isles.

Winter settles over Glencoe at the heart of the Scottish Highlands.

25 bali rain forest

BALI, INDONESIA

Dawn sees Bali's lush rain forest at its most beautiful. Pale sunlight dapples verdant glades where dew falls and the morning-fresh air is alive with birdsong. Mist rises above the trees and settles in the deep valleys that radiate from towering volcanoes at the island's heart. Waterfalls crash over moss-covered rocks, and fast-flowing rivers carve through narrow canyons. The Balinese, up with the sun, come to leave offerings at the estimated 20,000 Hindu temples that lie, half-hidden, deep within the forest.

DON'T MISS

The best way to see the heart of the rain forest is on a rafting tour from a base in Ubud, Bali's cultural center, riding the surging white water of the Ayung River as it runs through a beautiful, forest-shrouded gorge north of town.

The Ayung River cuts a swath through the undergrowth and luxuriant forest canopy of central Bali.




rivers&



26 great barrier reef

QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA

The seas of Australia's Great Barrier Reef are a rhapsody in blue, a shifting mosaic of sapphire, cobalt, and aquamarine, beneath which lies a still more beautiful world of almost infinite marine variety. Spread across 133,000 square miles (344,000 sq km), the reef is the world's largest living structure.

An aerial view of part of the Great Barrier Reef around Australia's Queensland coast, a structure so large it can be seen from outer space

shores

"Throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover." Mark Twain

There's magic at the water's edge. In water's solitary domain, in the immensity of the oceans, its beauty is simple—the shifting mosaic of current and color, the mirror it holds to the sky. But something happens where land meets sea or lake meets shore. Water is no longer alone. Now it shapes another landscape, and new kinds of beauty are born.

Sometimes, when the reflections of sun-dappled moorland are caught in a Scottish loch, such as Loch Katrine, or coral reefs thrive off warm-watered shores as they do amid Australia's Great Barrier Reef, the encounter of land and water is harmonious. At other times, it is shifting and shapeless, the limits of land and water blurred, as in the Amazon's sweep through its delta wetlands or the marshes and mangrove swamps of Florida's Everglades National Park.

Elsewhere, the meeting of land and water is dramatic and sometimes violent. On Brazil's border with Argentina, the fury of the Iguaçu waterfalls as they roar over an immense basalt outcrop makes for one of the world's most spectacular sights. On the Na Pali coast of Hawaii and Ireland's western ramparts, the millennial battle of sea and shore creates spectacular cliffs as the land surrenders to the crashing waves of the sea's advance. In Norway's fjords, the battle is over, won long ago by glacial ice, while on the powder-soft Pacific beaches of Tahiti, nothing could be farther from the fray than the lap of azure water against white sand.

There is alchemy wherever land meets water. The encounters are countless and varied. Many are remarkable; few are without beauty.

27 guilin

GUANGXI, CHINA

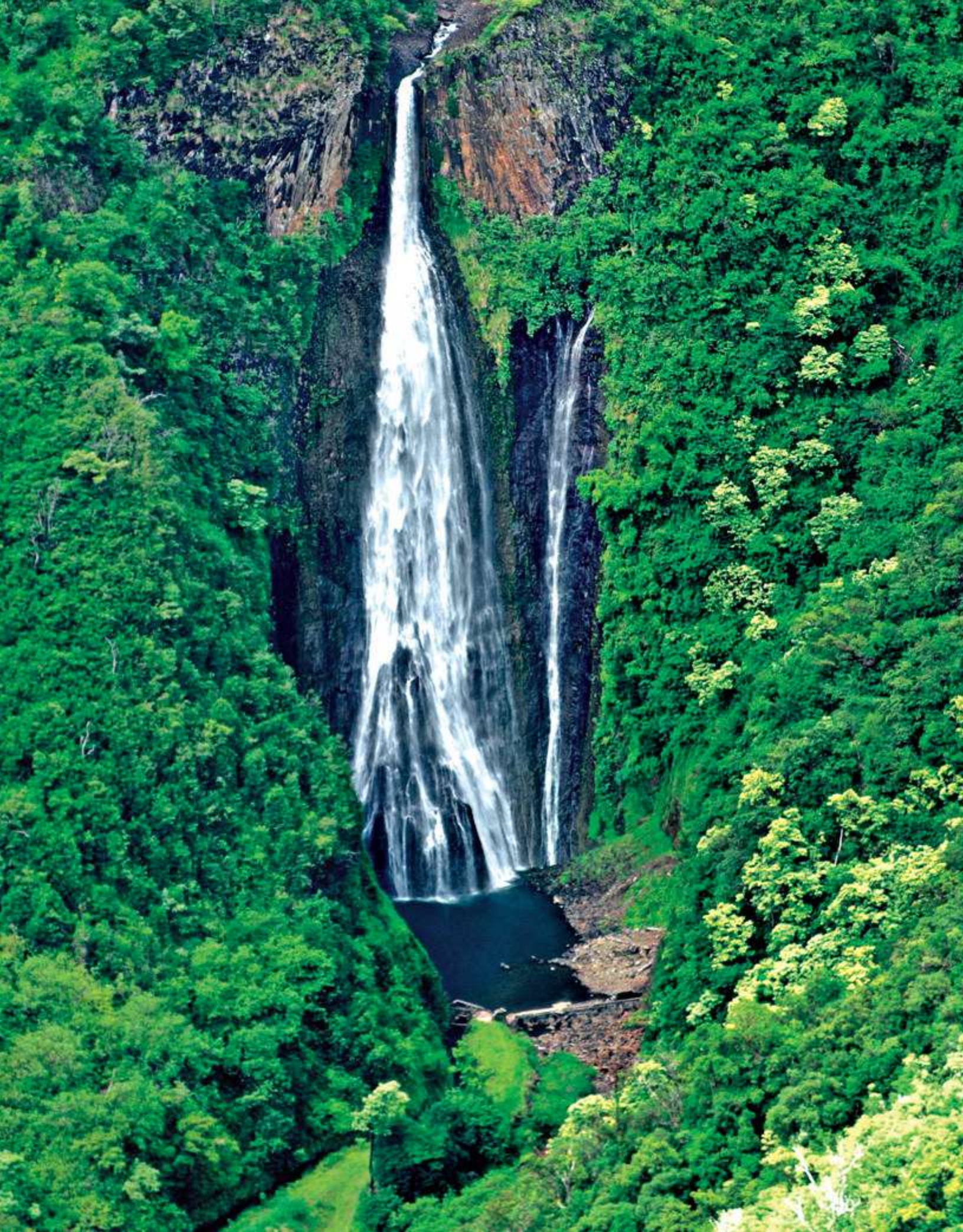
Nature's fancy for the fantastical and fairy-tale is given full rein in Guilin, in southern China, where wind, water, and time have created one of the world's most spectacular karst landscapes, carving vast limestone towers, cliffs, and pinnacles from the mountains and pastoral hills that flank the curves of the Li River.

DON'T MISS

To enjoy the best of the scenery, take one of the numerous daylong Li River boat cruises from Guilin downstream to the picturesque little town of Yangshuo.

A man rows on the Li River amid the spectacular limestone scenery for which the region is celebrated.







28 – na pali coast

KAUAI, HAWAII

Not for nothing did the coast of northwest Kauai feature in the movie *Jurassic Park*. The region's vegetation-swathed and deeply fissured Na Pali cliffs, which plunge thousands of feet to pristine and secluded beaches, look like a strange, prehistoric world. The cliffs have been formed by a twin assault from the incessant pounding of waves and the swift-flowing streams—fed by 460 inches (1,200 cm) of rainfall a year—that carve deep clefts and valleys as they crash to the sea from the island's precipitous interior.

DON'T MISS

View the cliffs, seabirds, and marine life (dolphins, turtles, and monk seals, plus whales from December through April) on a boat trip or by walking to Hanakapi'ai Beach (4 mi/6 km) or hiking the demanding Kalalau Trail (22 mi/35 km round-trip).

Fast-flowing streams and waterfalls (left) helped carve the steep chasms and fissures of the Na Pali coast (above).



29 crater lake

KLAMATH, OREGON

At 1,943 feet (592 m), Crater Lake in south-central Oregon is the United States' deepest lake. Because it is fed by precipitation—notably 45 feet (14 m) of snow a year—and has no inlets or outlets, it is also one of the country's purest, famed for the clarity and startling blue of its water. Formed after the eruption of Mount Mazama, part of the Cascade Range, around 7,700 years ago, it is surrounded by the jagged, cliff-edged rim of the former volcano and dotted with islands created by subsequent eruptions.

DON'T MISS

Two viewpoints offer wonderful vistas across the lake: the Cloudcap Lookout, accessed as part of the East and West Rim Drives (open to cars in summer only), and the three-hour hike to Mount Scott (8,929 ft/2,721 m) on the lake's eastern flank.

Crater Lake, with Wizard Island at its heart. Both were created by a series of volcanic eruptions.





30 the everglades

SOUTHERN FLORIDA

The constant creep of slow water weaves a spell in Everglades National Park, beautifully shaping and transforming one of the wildest and most diverse wetland ecosystems in North America. Cypress swamps, sawgrass marsh, mangrove forest, and numerous other habitats across the park's 1.5 million acres (6,070 sq km) provide a rich refuge for wildlife that includes such rare species as the manatee, Florida panther, and American crocodile.

DON'T MISS

Take a naturalist-led boat tour to get to the dense, swampy heart of the Everglades, twisting through thick mangrove forest, or to the park's more open saltwater margins on the trail of alligators, raccoons, bobcats, dolphins, and other wildlife.

A heron takes wing in Everglades National Park, flying over cypress swamps and mangrove forests that form one of the world's most important wetlands.







31 plitvice lakes

CROATIA

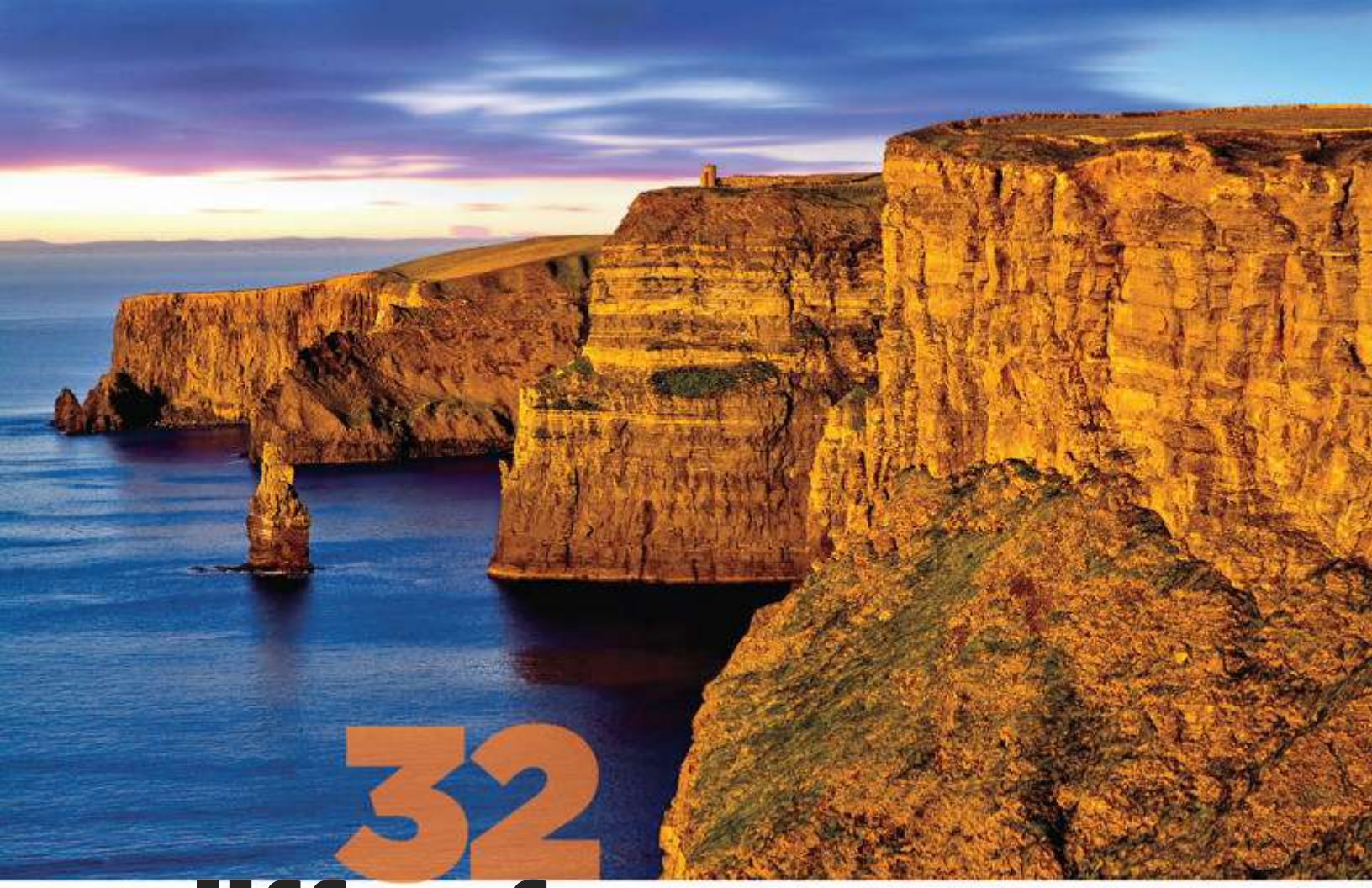
Lace-like veils of water, limestone ramparts, and the delicate fall of vegetation frame the 16 Plitvice Lakes, the enchanting centerpiece of Croatia's largest national park. Each is a mesmerizing and ever changing shade of green, blue, or gray, depending on the play of sunlight and the precise mineral and organic content of the water. Each lake feeds slowly into another over the course of five miles (8 km), separated by natural, slow-growing banks of calcified moss and algae.

DON'T MISS

The five-hour "H" itinerary is a network of trails, mostly on wooden boardwalks, that traverses the park and provides an all-embracing insight into the region's luminescent lakes, waterfalls, canyons, and surrounding beech woods.

One of the 16 Plitvice Lakes, featuring vivid coloring caused by a high mineral content





32 cliffs of moher

COUNTY CLARE, IRELAND

Vast sandstone ramparts, battered by wind and wave, mark the point at which Europe falls into the sea. Beyond the Cliffs of Moher, on Ireland's west coast, the Atlantic stretches empty to the distant shores of North America. Plants and flowers cling to tiny ledges, and up to 30,000 seabirds, including large colonies of puffins, wheel above the sea from rocky nesting sites. The cliffs reach 702 feet (214 m) at their highest point and, with over a million visitors a year, are one of Ireland's most popular attractions.

DON'T MISS

Take in the superb views from the cliff tops on the easy but blustery hike to O'Brien's Tower near the cliffs' highest point. Then take a boat trip from the pier in nearby Doolin to enjoy the cliffs and the crashing seas a little closer at hand.

Plants and flowers (left) cling to the Cliffs of Moher (above), one of Ireland's finest and most visited coastal gems.

33 zanzibar

AFRICA

The gods have been kind to Zanzibar, an exotic archipelago of numerous tiny islands and two large ones—Pemba and Unguja—just off the East African coast. They have blessed it with a climate and soils that favor the growing of cloves, nutmeg, cinnamon, and pepper—which is why the islands are often known as the "Spice Islands." On many places around the coast, they have been kinder still, creating long, palm-shaded beaches of powdery white sand, teeming coral reefs, and placid, warm turquoise seas.

DON'T MISS

Beaches are a must—one of the best is Kendwa, which has great diving—but also be sure to join a spice tour to see how spices are produced, and then see them for sale in the market in Stone Town, the historic heart of the islands' capital.

A jetty leads out through Zanzibar's clear, tranquil waters, sparkling in the midday sun.







34 big sur

COASTAL CALIFORNIA

No one seems quite to agree on its precise boundaries, but there's no mistaking the wild grandeur of Big Sur, 90 miles (145 km) or so of precipitous central Californian coastline that combines a sublime maritime beauty—cliffs that plunge straight into the ocean, Pacific sunsets, crescent beaches, hidden coves, dunes, and wave-lashed headlands—with breathtaking views and a habitat-rich hinterland of soaring redwood forest, rich riparian woodland, gentle pasture, mountain wilderness, and chaparral-covered hills.

DON'T MISS

Nine state parks and Highway 1, one of the world's most scenic drives, offer windows on much of Big Sur. Highlights include Bixby Creek Bridge, the Point Sur Lightstation, and the falls, creek, and canyon along the McWay Waterfall Trail.

McWay Falls in Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park, established in 1962 to help protect Big Sur



Victoria amazonica, *an Amazon native, is the world's largest water lily.*

35 « the amazon river

SOUTH AMERICA

Where to start with the beauty of the Amazon? With its grandeur, its 4,000-mile (6,500 km) length, and the immensity of its rain forest, or with the more intimate beauty found in the variety of its flora and fauna? Or perhaps with the infinite secret beauties of its smallest, unknowable reaches that no human eye will ever savor?

36 bay of fires »

EASTERN TASMANIA, AUSTRALIA

The Bay of Fires is a jewel among Tasmania's many pristine landscapes. Even in high season, there are plenty of opportunities to explore its dunes and rocky headlands at sunset or to camp right on its dazzling white-sand beaches, waking to swim in clear blue waters or walk among the foreshore's iconic rust-red, lichen-covered rocks as the sun bathes them in morning light.

Orange lichen covers much of the granite foreshore in the Bay of Fires.





37 « loch katrine

STIRLING, SCOTLAND

The romantic landscapes of Loch Katrine, a freshwater lake north of Glasgow, inspired Sir Walter Scott's poem *The Lady of the Lake* and Gioachino Rossini's opera *La donna del lago*. Today, they beguile visitors who come to hike, cycle, and fish or to take boat trips aboard the *Sir Walter Scott*, a historic steamship.

Romantic Loch Katrine and the southerly slopes of the Scottish Highlands



38 « milford sound

FIORDLAND, NEW ZEALAND

Visitors board boats or hike the Milford Track, New Zealand's most popular multiday trail, to see Milford Sound, a glacier-cut fjord whose immense rock walls, innumerable waterfalls, lush rain forests, and striking mountain peaks were described by writer Rudyard Kipling as the "eighth wonder of the world."

Mitre Peak (5,560 ft/1,695 m) reflected in the waters of Milford Sound

39 great blue » hole

BELIZE

Blue holes are submarine sinkholes, collapsed cave systems that became submerged as sea levels rose after the ice ages. The Great Blue Hole is found on Lighthouse Reef, 43 miles (70 km) from Belize City, and at around 407 feet (124 m) deep is among the world's top scuba-diving sites.

The depth and clarity of the water give the Great Blue Hole,, nestled within Lighthouse Reef 43.5 miles (70 km) from Belize City, its intense color.





40 « okavango delta

BOTSWANA

Botswana's Okavango Delta is one of nature's great anomalies: a vast inland delta created by seasonal floodwaters from the Angolan highlands to the north. From March to June, what would otherwise be an arid, desertlike landscape turns into a verdant oasis that dramatically transforms the lives of the region's wildlife and indigenous peoples.

At sunset, elephants come to drink in Botswana's Okavango Delta.





41 seychelles

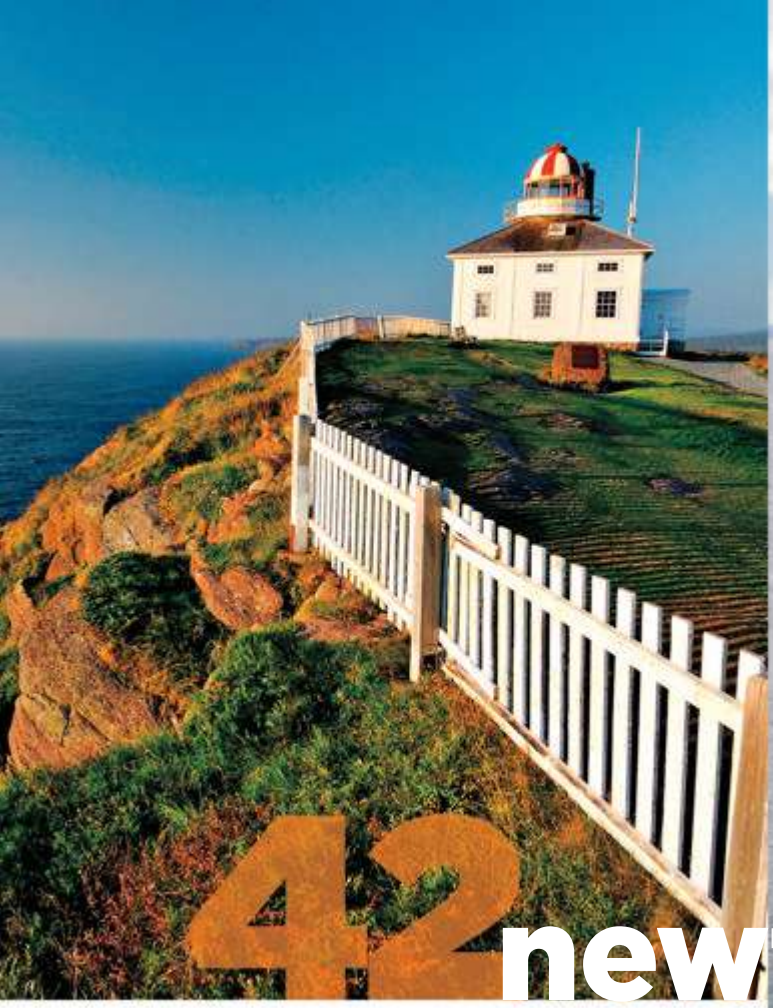
AFRICA

Beaches in the Seychelles—155 islands in the Indian Ocean almost 1,000 miles (around 1,500 km) from the African coast—are some of the most photographed in the world, and no wonder, given their matchless azure seas, teeming coral reefs, and fine, pale pink sands. They are made all the more beautiful by the rounded boulders that characterize much of the archipelago, wave sculpted from granite that formed 700 million years ago, making this some of the most ancient rock on Earth and the Seychelles the oldest islands of any ocean.

DON'T MISS

Anse Source d'Argent on La Digue is the finest among many fine beaches, but don't overlook the islands' interior beauty, notably the Vallée de Mai on Praslin, a habitat for the coco-de-mer, a palm with the largest seed in the plant kingdom.

Granite-strewn beaches in the Republic of Seychelles



42 newfoundland

EASTERN CANADA

Newfoundland's coast welcomed the first Europeans—the Vikings—to the New World more than a thousand years ago. They didn't stay, and no wonder, for though this is a beautiful place, it is also an inhospitable one, girded by cliffs, deep fjords, and wind-buffeted headlands. Icebergs drift offshore from April to June, and abandoned fishing settlements bear witness to the coast's long human history. Visitors come for the solitude, to take in the bracing Atlantic air, and to kayak, hike, or watch for whales and other wildlife.

DON'T MISS

Hikers and history buffs will relish the East Coast Trail, which runs for 165 miles (265 km) down the island's east coast, and the chance to visit the site of L'Anse aux Meadows, the only confirmed Viking settlement in North America.

The cliffs of Cape St. Mary (right) and Cape Spear (above), the most easterly point in North America



43 iguaçu falls

PARANÁ, BRAZIL

"Poor Niagara," exclaimed First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt on seeing Iguaçu Falls, for this immense series of cataracts on the Brazil-Argentina border is both higher and wider than Niagara Falls (though Niagara boasts a greater flow of water). The falls are formed where the Iguaçu River tumbles over a basalt ridge known as the Paraná Plateau. A thunderous sound fills the air, and spray from the 275-plus discrete falls veils the enveloping vegetation, rising almost 500 feet (150 m) above the turmoil below.

DON'T MISS

Two trails on the Argentine side showcase the best of the falls: the canyon-top Upper Circuit (0.6 mi/1 km) winds past five major falls, and the Lower Circuit (1 mi/1.6 km) passes even more falls, including the impressive Devil's Throat.

Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay share Iguaçu Falls, one the world's most spectacular waterfalls.





44
« lofoten islands
NORTHERN NORWAY

The Lofoten Islands lie above the Arctic Circle and form an icy jewel in Norway's spectacular glacier-carved coastal crown. Simple waterfront villages—between which you can hike or cycle on dedicated tracks—sit on the edge of deep fjords, framed by cliffs that teem with millions of seabirds and steep-sided mountains coveted by hikers and skiers.

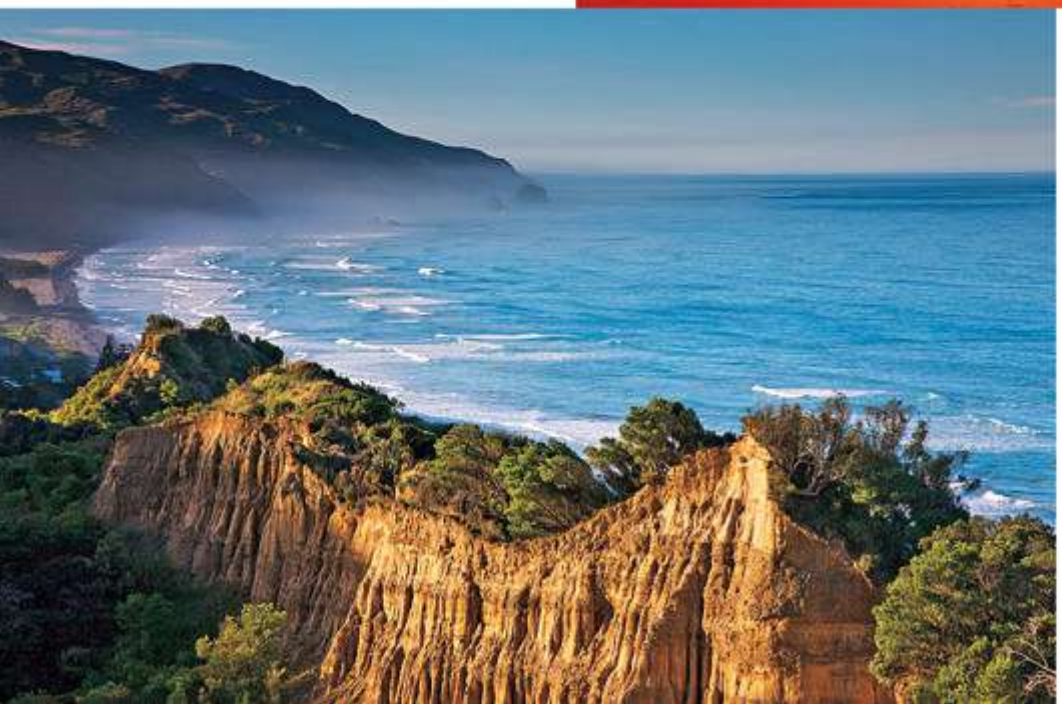
Tiny Reine, on Moskenes Island, is a typical Lofoten fishing settlement.

45
tahiti »
FRENCH POLYNESIA

Who wouldn't want to be shipwrecked on Tahiti, the largest of 118 islands and atolls that make up French Polynesia in the South Pacific? Its warm seas, swaying palms, coral reefs, and peerless powder-fine beaches are the epitome of the desert-island idyll. Life is relaxed, the people gentle and welcoming in a way that makes it difficult to leave.

The sun sets on another perfect day on Tahiti in the South Pacific.





46
« kaikoura
CANTERBURY, NEW ZEALAND

Kaikoura takes its name from the indigenous Maori words *kai* (food) and *koura* (crayfish), hinting at the richness of its seas, which attracts a wealth of marine wildlife and is complemented on shore by the coastal allure of cliffs, craggy headlands, and the snow-dusted peaks of the Kaikoura Ranges.

Cliffs frame Kaikoura on the east coast of New Zealand's South Island.



47
« the lake district
ENGLAND

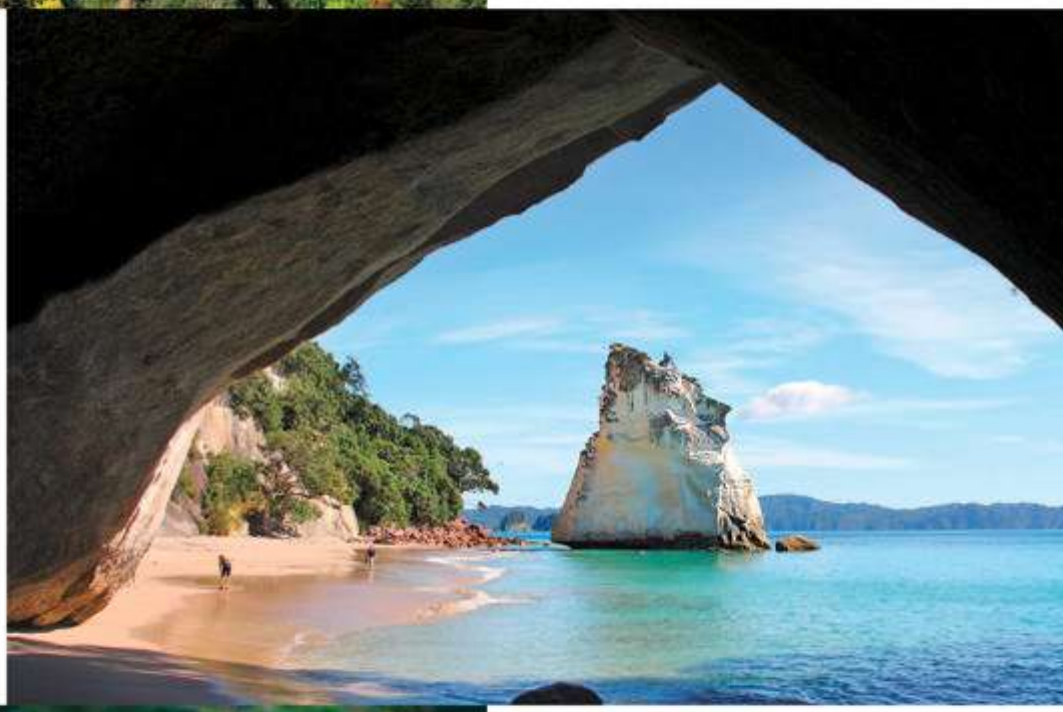
Poets, writers, and artists have long celebrated the Lake District, England's most romantic landscape, a mountainous region of quaint villages and placid lakes that can be explored on the boats that ply the waters or by ambling down the many country roads and tracks along the lakeshores or through rustic farms, woodland, and high peaks.

Derwentwater, one of the 20 major lakes that make up the Lake District

48
cathedral cove »
COROMANDEL PENINSULA, NEW ZEALAND

The soft rocks at Cathedral Cove on New Zealand's North Island yield gently to the tides, resulting in a complex coast of sea caves, stacks, arches, and white-sand beaches. Visitors can explore the coast and its pastoral hinterland on short or multiday trails or swim, snorkel, and kayak in the offshore marine reserve.

A natural rock arch frames the remote, magical beach at Cathedral Cove.





49
« okefenokee swamp
SOUTHERN GEORGIA

The Okefenokee Swamp is one of North America's oldest freshwater ecosystems, a pristine 354,000-acre (1,432 sq km) wilderness—accessible via trails, boat tours, boardwalks, and observation towers—of marsh, lakes, islands, prairie, open wetlands, and cypress forest.

A group of white ibises in Georgia's Okefenokee National Wildlife Reserve





50 cannon beach

COASTAL OREGON

It was "the grandest and most pleasing prospect which my eyes ever surveyed," said the 19th-century explorer William Clark of looking down at Cannon Beach. Two hundred years later, the view is little changed and can still be enjoyed from a lookout dubbed Clark's Point of View, accessed from one of the area's many trails. Broad swaths of sandy beach stretch for nine miles (14.5 km) along this tract of Oregon coastline, backed by a mixture of gentle foreshore, conifer forest, and the peaks of the Coast Range.

DON'T MISS

Haystack Rock is a 235-foot (72 m) offshore basalt monolith, the third largest such monolith in the world. A protected marine refuge, it supports rich and diverse intertidal habitats and provides a home for thousands of nesting seabirds.

Haystack Rock and the Needles stand silhouetted against the sunset on Oregon's Cannon Beach.


cities&

51 neuschwanstein castle

BAVARIA, GERMANY

This fairy tale in stone—the inspiration for the castle in Walt Disney's *Sleeping Beauty*—was the whim of Ludwig II, the reclusive king of Bavaria, who in 1866 vowed to build a private retreat that would surpass the castles of the "German knights of old." In the end, he spent just 172 days in the castle before his death.

Despite its size, Neuschwanstein Castle was built to accommodate one man—King Ludwig II of Bavaria. It now receives 1.3 million visitors a year.



"Architecture has recorded the great ideas of the human race. Not only every religious symbol, but every human thought has its page in that vast book." Victor Hugo

Can human endeavor match the wonder of nature? We look at the natural world and can only marvel at its invention and infinite variety. Set against the work of millennia, our own creations seem momentary. While we know that time will have its way with our world, we also know that human creations can be as inspiring and praiseworthy as nature's greatest monuments.

In cities like London, Paris, St. Petersburg, and New York, we revel in monuments that bear witness to centuries of human vision and ingenuity. Empires and buildings fall while these cities endure, gilded by generations with new wonders. In Rome, the work of the Caesars sits alongside that of popes and Renaissance princes. In London, a thousand years separates Westminster Abbey from the glittering skyscrapers of the modern city. Different cityscapes bear witness to the variety and richness of human imagination, from Oxford, cerebral and honey stoned, across the world to Kyoto, a city of temples and cherry blossoms.

We marvel, too, at the cities that didn't endure—Machu Picchu, lost city of the Inca; rose-red Petra, half as old as time—and find that the works of bygone civilizations are as strange and beautiful as our own. We wonder at structures whose scale seems beyond the realm of our power—the colossal pyramids, Bagan, the Great Wall of China—and at hilltop castles, palaces, and other magnificent flights of architectural fancy that are the stuff of fairy tales.

We look at all these creations and find a simple truth: that while we may stand in awe at nature's work, there is also room among the beautiful places for the wildest wonders of the human mind.

52 rome

ITALY

The ancients called it *caput mundi*—the head of the world. Rome has been a place of awe and grandeur for more than 3,000 years, the city of Caesars, popes, and princes; the city of romance, *la dolce vita,* and languorous days; the city of churches and museums, fountain-splashed piazzas, and majestic monuments to a golden age of empire.

DON'T MISS

Walk to Piazza della Rotonda, find a café, order a drink, and simply stare in awe at the vast facade of the Pantheon, the world's greatest Roman monument.

Dusk settles over the Eternal City, the waters of the Tiber River, and the immense dome of St. Peter's Basilica.



53 machu picchu

PERU

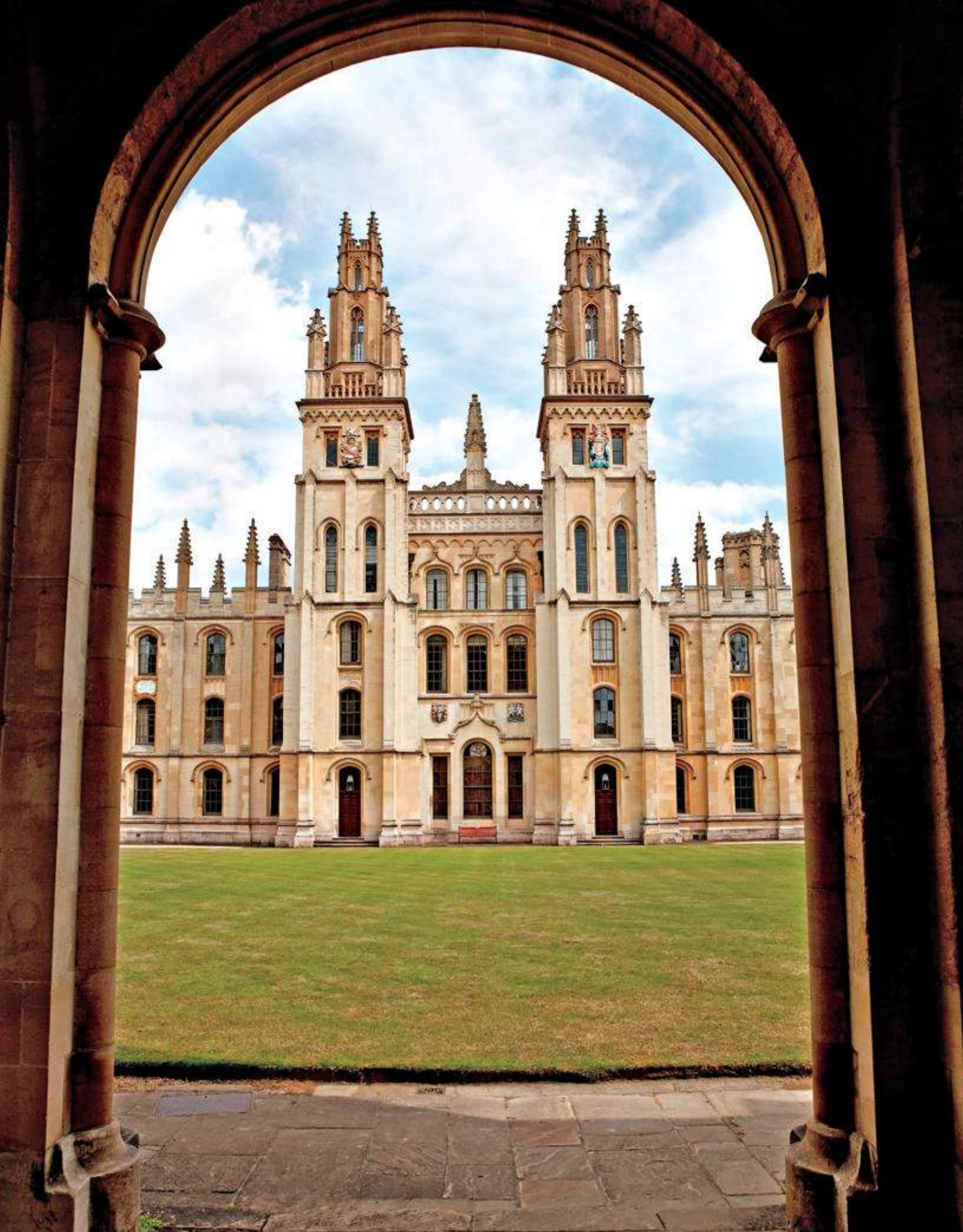
By rights, it shouldn't be there: the mist-shrouded heights of the Peruvian Andes are no place to build. Machu Picchu is so remote that it eluded even the Spanish conquistadores, coming to the attention of the outside world only as recently as 1911. Yet build the Inca did, taking an extraordinarily beautiful setting and forging a man-made masterpiece—the purpose of which remains unknown—whose stone ramps and immense terraces seem to be extensions of the landscape itself.

DON'T MISS

Arrive at Machu Picchu at dawn, having hiked the two- or four-day Inca Trail, a high-mountain trek through majestic scenery scattered with Inca ruins. Permits and porters are obligatory, and altitude acclimatization is highly recommended.

Machu Picchu—the "lost city of the Incas"—sits at 7,970 feet (2,430 m) in the remote Peruvian Andes.







54 oxford

ENGLAND

Dreaming spires, chiming bells, royal retreat, seat of learning, and—some would say—the most beautiful town in England: Oxford has many claims to fame, but its chief glories are the buildings of the old city itself, and in particular the collection of colleges and ancient university institutions at its heart. The warm, honey-colored Cotswold stone with which all are built and the courtyards or "quads" around which they cluster result in an architectural harmony unequaled anywhere in Europe.

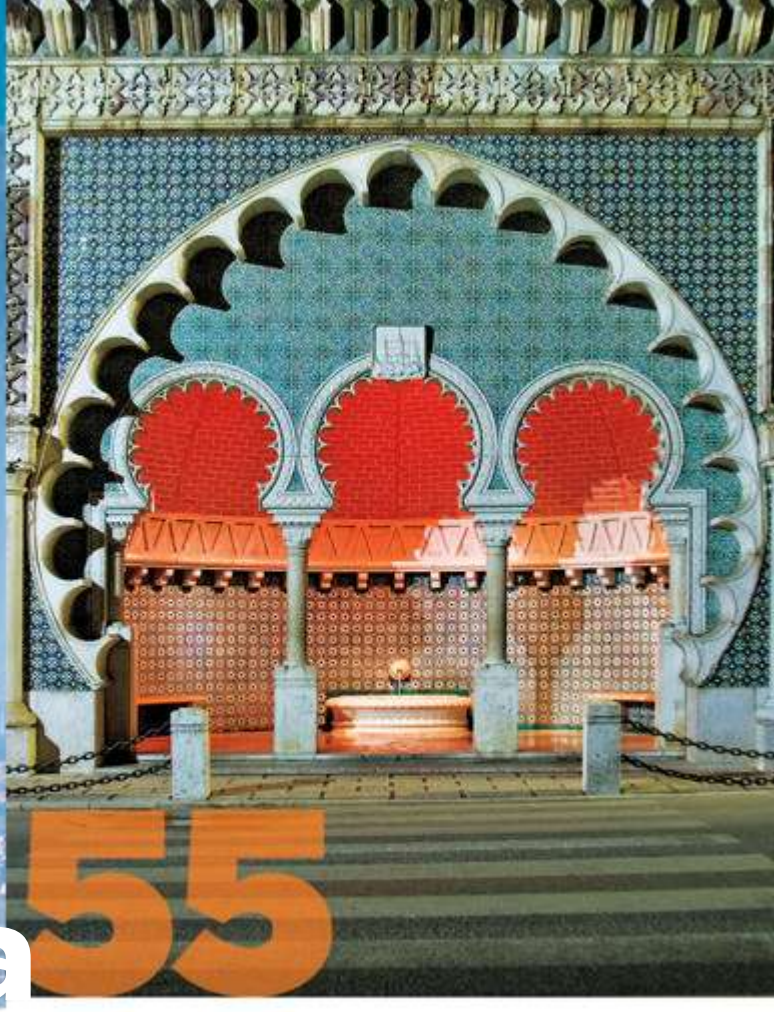
DON'T MISS

Walk or cycle down the winding cobblestone streets around the Bodleian Library—being sure to visit any colleges that are open to the public—and soak in the Cotswold stone buildings, taking in this prestigious city much as dons and poets have done for centuries.

All Souls College (left), founded in 1438, and central Oxford (above), with Radcliffe Camera (1737) at its heart







sintra 55

PORTUGAL

Sintra is a picturesque, wooded hill town, leafy and cool in summer, mild in winter, and privy to beautiful views year-round. What sets it apart from any number of other towns in Portugal is its proximity to Lisbon, the country's capital, just 17 miles (28 km) to the southeast. This long made it a favored retreat for Portugal's kings, who from about the 15th century began a series of lavish palaces and gardens here that dazzle with their extravagant and often wildly exotic architecture.

DON'T MISS

The Palácio Nacional da Pena is a fantastical caprice, a royal palace built mostly in the 19th century that reworks Portugal's Gothic, Renaissance, Islamic, and other styles into one of the great architectural pastiches of the Romantic era.

The Palácio Nacional da Pena, one of several historic palaces and castles in the hills around Sintra



56
« savannah
GEORGIA

Savannah's townscape has proved wonderfully resistant to change since its founding in 1733, preserving a glorious medley of period buildings—notably white wooden and pillar-fronted houses—as well as stately squares, parks, and elegant streets lined with trees draped with Spanish moss, making it one of the largest national historic landmark districts in America.

Savannah's Forsyth Park dates from the 1840s and its fountain from 1858.

57
bergen »
WESTERN NORWAY

Wood and color are humble building blocks, but in Bryggen—the 1,000-year-old district at the heart of Norway's second largest city—the vivid reds, yellows, oranges, and creams of its wonderful, steeply gabled wooden buildings create one of Europe's loveliest and most unusual historic quarters. The district has its origins in the quayside warehouses built by foreign merchants during the Middle Ages.

Former warehouses and merchants' homes in the historic Bryggen district





58
« chichén itzá
YUCATÁN, MEXICO

Chichén Itzá tantalizes with hints as to the nature of its former inhabitants. The great monuments of this Maya city, at its height in the tenth century, point to a civilization of obvious power. But what of the site's immense stone enclosures, built simply to play ball games, which suggest an altogether more frivolous side to the Maya character?

The Temple of Kukulkan serves as the centerpiece of the Maya capital.



59
« new york city
NEW YORK

No one really sees New York for the first time: the Manhattan skyline is the most familiar, most photographed modern cityscape on Earth. Yet visit this city and the dazzling reality of the distant prospect surpasses any imagined expectation. It promises, in the words of F. Scott Fitzgerald in *The Great Gatsby,* "all the mystery and beauty of the world."

The Manhattan skyline illuminates the Hudson River and the Brooklyn Bridge.

60
kyoto »
JAPAN

The seat of the emperor and capital of Japan for over a thousand years, Kyoto hides its beauty beyond the bounds of the modern city among lakeside shrines, pagodas, peaceful tree-covered hills, gilded temples and pavilions, and the tranquil gardens and teahouses of imperial villas and palaces. Come in spring and a profusion of cherry blossoms garlands the city with added natural beauty.

Kinkaku-ji, or the Golden Pavilion, is Kyoto's most celebrated temple.





61
« rostov veliky
RUSSIA

In 1667, Iona of Rostov, a powerful patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, vowed to create a residence to rival Moscow's Kremlin 126 miles (202 km) to the southwest. The result is a gigantic fairy tale in stone, a unique lakeside confection that combines ornate churches, numerous palaces, and a profusion of towers, spires, and silvery domes.

The Cathedral of the Assumption and Church of the Resurrection



Machu Picchu—the "lost city of the Incas"—sits at 7,970 ft (2,430 m) in the remote Peruvian Andes.



62 st. petersburg

RUSSIA

When Peter the Great, one of the most powerful rulers in Russian history, built a city, it was never going to be ordinary. Sure enough, St. Petersburg, which he founded in 1703 and which remained Russia's imperial capital until 1918, is a metropolis built on the grandest scale. Noble squares and wide thoroughfares, best enjoyed by taking a stroll along the stately Neva River, provide a vast stage for hundreds of magnificent state buildings, churches, and the vast neoclassical facades of countless palaces.

DON'T MISS

The Hermitage, one of the world's greatest museums with some three million artifacts, occupies six historical buildings on the beautiful waterside Palace Embankment, including the former Winter Palace of the Romanov emperors.

The Church of the Savior of Spilled Blood, dedicated to the memory of Tsar Alexander II



63 the great wall

CHINA

On its own, a wall would not be much to celebrate—but a wall that measures over 5,000 miles (8,000 km) in length and marches majestically across mountains, plains, and valleys? China's Great Wall is not one wall from one era, nor is it, strictly speaking, a continuous wall. Its earliest reaches probably date from the seventh century B.C. The majority of the present structure dates from the 14th-century Ming dynasty, comprising 3,889 miles (6,259 km) of wall, 223 miles (359 km) of trenches, and 1,387 miles (2,232 km) of natural barriers like rivers and mountains.

DON'T MISS

Some of the most impressive and best-restored parts of the Great Wall can be visited from Beijing, notably the tract near the Juyong Pass. The wall here is over 16 feet (5 m) wide and 26 feet (7.8 m) high.

Much of the Great Wall, built to defend China's rugged northern borders, dates from the 14th century.





64 london

ENGLAND

History has dealt London many hammer blows—the Great Fire of 1666, the Blitz of 1940, the decline of its docks in the twilight of empire—but none have had any lasting effect on this charming city that manages to reinvent itself while continuing to treasure its past. Heritage and a vibrant present commingle among the city's superlative museums, beautiful parks, cozy pubs, iconic red buses, and stunning sights such as St. Paul's Cathedral and Buckingham Palace. Only the bowler hat has been consigned to history.

DON'T MISS

Take a bus to the Royal Albert Hall—being sure to sit upstairs, of course, to enjoy the views—and walk through Hyde Park, heading first to Kensington Palace, then past the Round Pond and the Serpentine (a lake), concluding at Hyde Park Corner.

Sunset over London as seen—note the foreground shadow—from the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral.

Machu Picchu—the "lost city of the Incas"—sits at 7,970 ft (2,430 m) in the remote Peruvian Andes.



65 santorini

GREECE

Some claim it was the source of the legend of Atlantis, while others say it caused the collapse of the Minoan civilization on Crete. What is sure is that the volcanic eruption at the heart of the Aegean 3,600 years ago, one of the most powerful in history, had the happy effect of creating the collapsed caldera that makes up Santorini. It is an island painted in vivid colors: the white of cliff-top villages, the green of tiny vineyards, the black of ancient lava, and the encircling sapphire of a sparkling sea.

DON'T MISS

Choose the cool of sunset or early morning to hike from Fira to Oia (6.5 miles/10.5 km), a superb three-hour, high-level cliff walk that offers breathtaking views of the caldera, or hire a bike and follow an almost parallel road route.

Visitors flock to the picturesque village of Oia to watch some of the finest sunsets in the Aegean.

Machu Picchu—the "lost city of the Incas"—sits at 7,970 ft (2,430 m) in the remote Peruvian Andes.



66 bagan

MYANMAR

The sky lightens pink in the east to reveal a verdant plain, partly covered in stands of palm and tamarind. Rising from the green canopy are hundreds of temples, otherworldly silhouettes stretching into the shimmering dawn haze. In the distance, the faint outlines of distant mountains frame the great sweep of the Ayeyarwady River. Some 2,230 of an original 4,450 temples survive, built by the kings of Bagan from 1057 to 1287 when their kingdom was swept away by earthquakes and Kublai Khan and his invading Mongols.

DON'T MISS

Hot-air balloon rides over Bagan at dawn are an unforgettable way to see the temples, revealing countless sun-burnished domes rising from the deep green of bush and jungle, along with views of the traditional villages that scatter the plain.

Htilominlo Temple and some of Bagan's hundreds of other temples, seen from a hot air balloon at dawn

Machu Picchu, the lost city of the Incas, sits at 7,970 ft (2,430 m) in the remote Peruvian Andes.





67 seville

ANDALUSIA, SPAIN

It's known as the Mudéjar style, an exotic architectural hybrid that gilds the Romanesque and Gothic restraint of southern Europe with the exuberance and intricacies of Islamic art. Nowhere is it more beautifully realized than in honey-stoned Seville, Spanish now but a Moorish vassal for five centuries until 1248. When the Muslims left, their influence remained, infusing the city's buildings for centuries afterward and creating a dazzling, city-size monument to the marriage of Islam and Christianity.

DON'T MISS

The Islamic influence on Seville's architecture can be best seen in the Alcázar, formerly a Moorish fortress and now a royal palace, and in the cathedral, which was begun in 1401 but incorporates many elements from a former mosque on the site.

The Museo Arqueológico (above) and Los Baños de Doña María de Padilla (right) in the Alcázar palace





Machu Picchu—the "lost city of the Incas"—sits at 7,970 ft (2,430 m) in the remote Peruvian Andes.



68 istanbul

TURKEY

By rights, cultures should collide in Istanbul. It is a city that bridges East and West, straddling Europe and Asia, and one that has been subject to pagan, Christian, and Muslim rulers. Yet its cityscape is a happy example of what happens when conventions are transcended, whether in the fourth-century Hagia Sophia—a Christian cathedral until 1453, then a mosque until 1932, and now a museum—or Sultanahmet Camii, the Blue Mosque, infused with the architectural elements of an earlier Byzantine epoch.

DON'T MISS

Hagia Sophia, begun in 360, is one of Europe's greatest Byzantine buildings. Admire its vast interior, covered in precious sixth-century mosaics and adorned with treasures brought from across the Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman empires.

Hagia Sophia is now a museum, but began its life as a church and later became a mosque.



69 « pyramids of giza

EGYPT

What could be simpler in form yet quite as beautiful as the Pyramids of Giza, the oldest of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World? Built some 4,500 years ago as tombs for a triumvirate of pharaohs, the three principal pyramids form part of a larger necropolis on the Giza Plateau, 15 miles (23 km) southwest of Cairo.

A caravan of camels passes in front of the Pyramids of Giza near Cairo.

70 amsterdam »

THE NETHERLANDS

Amsterdam's labyrinthine canals ripple out from the heart of the city, brisk with sightseeing boats by day and shimmering with lights by night. Houseboats, churches, and narrow houses with beautiful, oft-glimpsed period interiors line the waterways, which were built, like many of the city's loveliest buildings, with the riches garnered during the 17th-century golden age of the Dutch empire.

A wintery dusk settles over houseboats on one of Amsterdam's canals.





71 « petra

MA'AN, JORDAN

Petra—from the Greek *petra,* or stone—was the capital of the Nabateans between 400 B.C. and A.D. 106, a "rose-red city half as old as time" in the words of the 19th-century English cleric John Burgon, colored as if by the "blush of dawn" and grown from the rock as if by magic: "eternal, silent, beautiful, alone."

The rock-cut temple sand tombs of El-Deir, the most celebrated of Petra's ruins, emanate a rosy glow.



72
« washington
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

On July 16, 1790, an act was approved to create the capital of the United States on the banks of the Potomac River. In the years that followed came the memorials, wide vistas, and great buildings of nationhood—the Capitol, Washington Monument, Jefferson Memorial, National Mall—that lend Washington the gravitas and imposing beauty of a national capital.

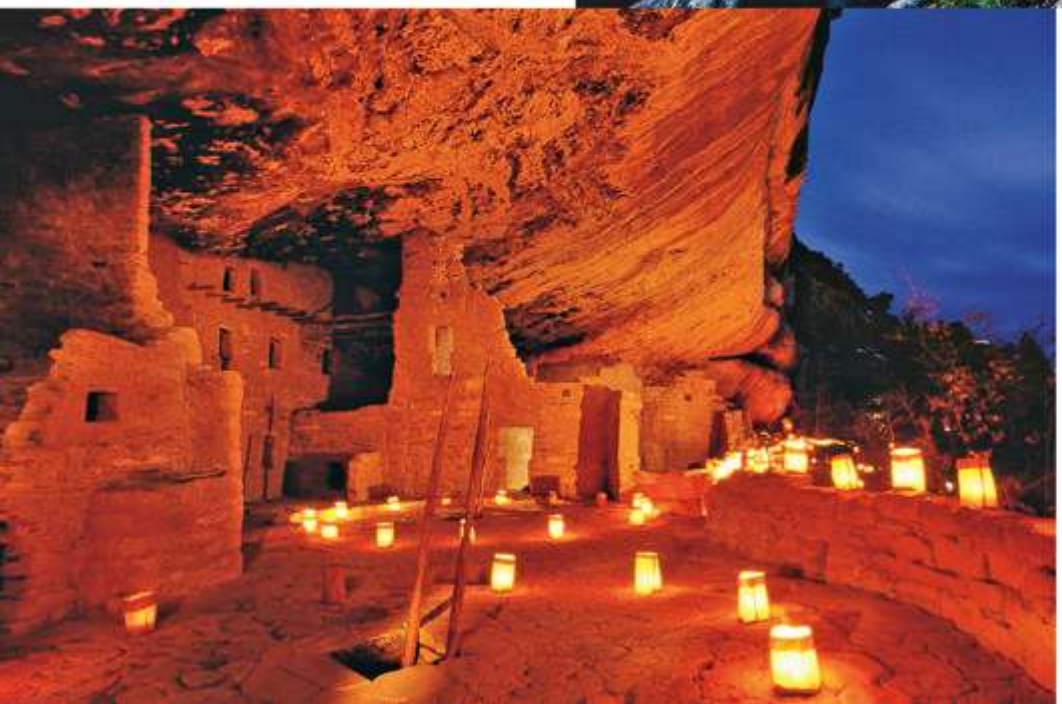
The Jefferson Memorial at night, floodlit and serene on the Tidal Basin

73
cape town »
SOUTH AFRICA

Cape Town lies cradled between mountain and sea on what the 16th-century English explorer Sir Francis Drake called "the fairest Cape we saw in the whole circumference of the earth." Table Mountain (3,563 ft/1,086 m)—flat topped and often mist wreathed—provides the cape's crowning beauty. Visitors can take a cableway or hike to its various lookouts for views across the city to the ocean beyond.

Lookouts on Table Mountain offer superb views of the city below.





74
« mesa verde
COLORADO

Amid the remote mesas of southwestern Colorado, sheltered in the steep sandstone alcoves of the canyon walls, are some 600 cliff-cut dwellings, built—and then mysteriously abandoned—by the region's indigenous Puebloan people between 500 and 1300. Rediscovered by cowboys in 1874, the pueblos can now be visited on ranger-led guided tours.

Night lights illuminate part of the 130-room Spruce Tree House.

75 paris

FRANCE

Baron Haussmann's reordering of Paris in the 19th century, which drove broad boulevards through the labyrinthine alleys of the medieval city, was hardly designed to create one of the world's most romantic places. Yet something magical happened: charm and intimacy flourished amid the city's new order of bohemian cafés, tiny patisseries, wonderful restaurants, rambling flea markets, and quaint neighborhoods. In Paris, the rational and the romantic blend together in a way that feels distinctly French.

DON'T MISS

Join a guided walking tour through the city's smaller neighborhoods, where parts of medieval Paris little touched by Haussmann's makeover survive: the Marais, Montmartre, Saint-Germain, Île de la Cité, and Notre Dame and the Latin Quarter.

Place de la Concorde, Paris's largest square, crowns the east end of the grand Champs-Élysées.

Machu Picchu, the "lost city of the Incas," sits at 7,970 ft (2,430 m) in the remote Peruvian Andes.




stark&



76
the arctic
SWEDEN

There are the landscapes of the Swedish Arctic—forests, frosted tundra, and sparkling lakes. There is the wildlife—wolves, bears, and reindeer. And then there is the breath-stealing aurora borealis, or northern lights, one of nature's most elusive wonders. The Sami people call the aurora many names, including *guovssahas,* "the light that can be heard."

The aurora borealis, a shimmering nocturnal dance of color, lights the Arctic sky above Kiruna, Sweden's northernmost city.

“Do not go where the path may lead. Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.” Ralph Waldo Emerson

It is a beautiful paradox: the wildest and most inhospitable places are often the places we most want to be. There is “pleasure in the pathless woods,” wrote the English poet Lord Byron, “rapture on the lonely shore.” Wilderness is a solace, the solitude it offers a balm.

But sanctuary and escape are never easy. Wild places are hard to reach, but their remoteness only increases the satisfaction to be found in discovering them. Wilderness, while invariably rich in flora and fauna, also appears empty, which is a part of its charm: the emptier the better. From the rippling grasslands of the American prairie to the tundra of the Northwest Passage, it is the elemental beauty of the wide-open sky and the windswept plain that stirs and seduces.

Beneath these skies, of course, not all is emptiness. When we stumble on wilderness, we find it is a stage for the wondrous: the exotic creatures of the Galápagos Islands; the strange moonscape of the South Dakota Badlands; the celestial lights of the aurora borealis flickering over Arctic forests. The wildest places are often the starkest places, their unique landscapes painted in extremes of cold and heat, from the dazzling white of Bolivia’s salt pans and the immensity of Antarctica’s shimmering sheets of ice to the shifting, sun-drilled dunes of the Sahara desert.

A hundred years ago, the great American naturalist John Muir wrote of the “tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people beginning to find . . . that going to the mountains is going home; that wilderness is a necessity.” A century on, we seek out the world’s wild places more than ever, certain that in their emptiness we will find something we have lost.

77 devils marbles

OUTBACK AUSTRALIA

In a remote area of the Northern Territory—a site sacred to the indigenous Aborigines—crouch clusters of huge granite outcroppings. Scoured by wind and seared by desert heat, they are gradually eroded into precariously poised and ever rounder boulders, creating one of Australia’s strangest and most iconic landscapes.

DON’T MISS

Camp overnight and wake to wide desert skies, then hike the easy trails in the 4,453 acres (1,802 ha) of the Karlu Karlu/Devils Marbles Conservation Reserve.

Despite their remote location, the granite boulders known as the Devils Marbles are visited by almost 100,000 people a year.





78 badlands national park

SOUTH DAKOTA

Around 70 million years ago, sea covered most of the present-day Great Plains. Today, some of the thick sediments of that sea, lifted and eroded, have become the rugged canyons and deeply carved buttes of the 244,000-acre (987 sq km) Badlands National Park. This otherworldly landscape would be remarkable on its own, but the region also contains the world's richest fossil beds from the Oligocene period (laid down 20–35 million years ago), along with the largest protected area of mixed-grass prairie in the United States.

DON'T MISS

Take Interstate 90 north of the park for access to Badlands Loop Road (Hwy. 240). This scenic drive winds through some of the park's finest landscapes, offering a host of scenic overlooks and trailheads for a wide variety of hikes.

From the realms of science fiction: the badlands of South Dakota seem to belong on another planet.







79 ice sheets

ANTARCTICA

Snow falls slowly across Antarctica: barely enough in a year to cover your shoes. But it collects gradually, flake on flake, year on year, until it compacts to form the ice that covers 98 percent of the continent. Over millennia, gravity pulls some of this immense ice sheet toward the sea, where it forms floating ice shelves or calves into icebergs. Wildlife has a chance—just—on this icy fringe, and penguins, seals, whales, and seabirds contrive to live in the coldest, driest, and windiest place on Earth.

DON'T MISS

Small-boat cruises—generally those with fewer than 100 people—can edge much closer than large cruise vessels to Antarctica's penguins, seals, and other wildlife and to the awe-inspiring, icebound landscapes of the "White Continent."

A leopard seal on the Antarctic pack ice. The leopard seal is the only seal to prey on other seals.





80 salar de uyuni

BOLIVIA

Little disturbs the monochrome of the world's largest salt flat, which sits high in the Andes at 11,985 feet (3,653 m). When it does, the beauty of the dazzling, horizon-filling white is only thrown into sharper relief: mineral lakes of emerald and vermilion, the pyramidal peaks of vast volcanoes, and, every November, the pink of the thousands of flamingos that come to Salar de Uyuni to breed. As remarkable as the region's beauty is its flatness—a variation in height of just four feet (1.2 m) across some 4,500 square miles (12,000 sq km).

DON'T MISS

Gaze down at the sea of white from the Isla de los Pescados, or Isla Incawasi, one of the Salar's "islands," most of which are composed of a fossilized, coral-like substance. Many are covered in slow-growing cacti that can be as much as 1,000 years old.

The Salar de Uyuni salt flat (left) evolved from a prehistoric lake and sits high in the Andes (above).



81 « galápagos islands

ECUADOR

The "Enchanted Isles"—or the "Islas Encantadas," as the earliest Spanish sailors called them—still cast a spell. Visitors leapfrog by small boat from one island to the next, mesmerized by exotic creatures that, almost predator-free over evolutionary millennia, remain unfazed by their strange, two-legged guests.

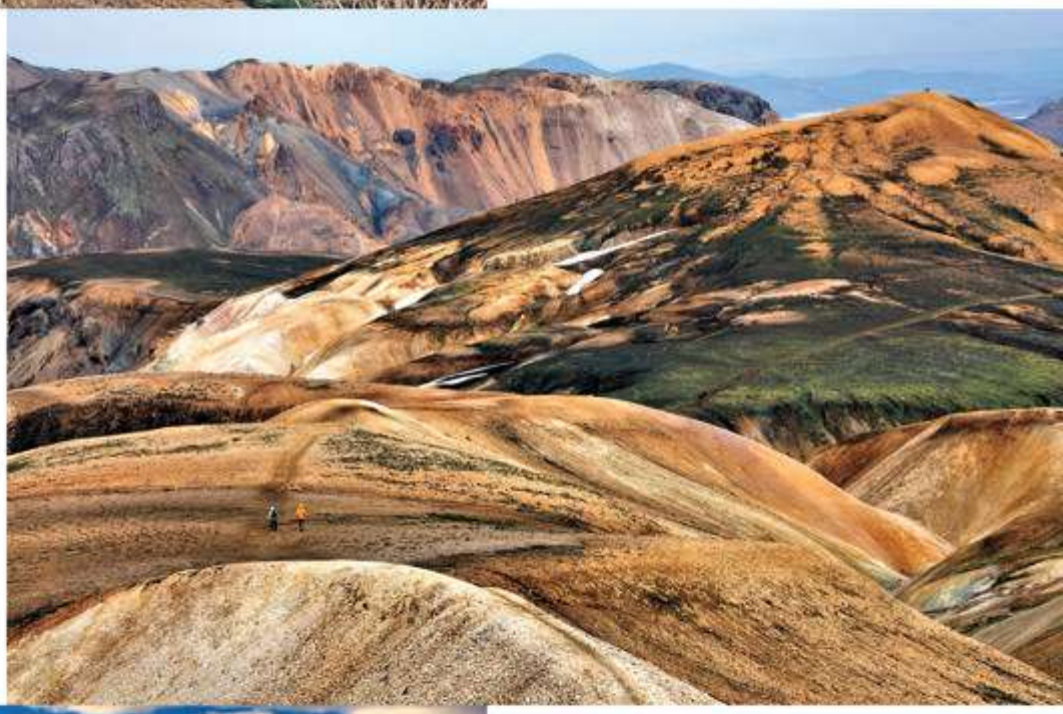
An iguana on Floriana, one of the islands of the Galápagos archipelago

82 landmanna-laugar »

SOUTHERN ICELAND

A vivid volcanic terrain—steaming hot springs, bubbling sulfurous pools, and a mountainous moonscape streaked with strangely colored lava—draws visitors to Landmannalaugar. Hikers in particular come to tackle Bláhn-júkur (Blue Peak) and the four-day Laugavegur Trail, two of Iceland's most popular hikes.

Hikers are dwarfed by Landmannal-augar's immense volcanic landscapes.





83 « chocolate hills

BOHOL ISLAND, THE PHILIPPINES

It's easy to see how the hundreds of conical hills—a rare karst landscape—on Bohol, the Philippines' tenth larg-est island, got their name, at least if you visit in the dry season, when the grass covering the hillocks withers to a chocolate brown.

Sun-browned grass during the dry season gives the Chocolate Hills their name.



84 « sossusvlei dunes

NAMIBIA

At 1,250 feet (380 m), the sinuous dunes of the southern Namib Desert are some of the highest in the world, bolstered in places by a binding of vegetation that is watered by seasonal rivers and the heavy fogs that roll in from the Atlantic Ocean. The sand's high iron content lends the dunes their pink-orange hues.

Hikers follow the crest of a megadune in Namib Naukluft National Park.

85 racetrack playa

DEATH VALLEY, CALIFORNIA

How can it be? How can boulders move by themselves across a dry, flat lake bed on the flanks of Death Valley? The wind, some say, and the rare winter rains that render the lake bed slick with mud. No one knows for sure, and the Playa, a place of silence and mountains etched dark against the blue of desert skies, isn't telling.

One of the "sailing stones" and tracks that give Racetrack Playa its name



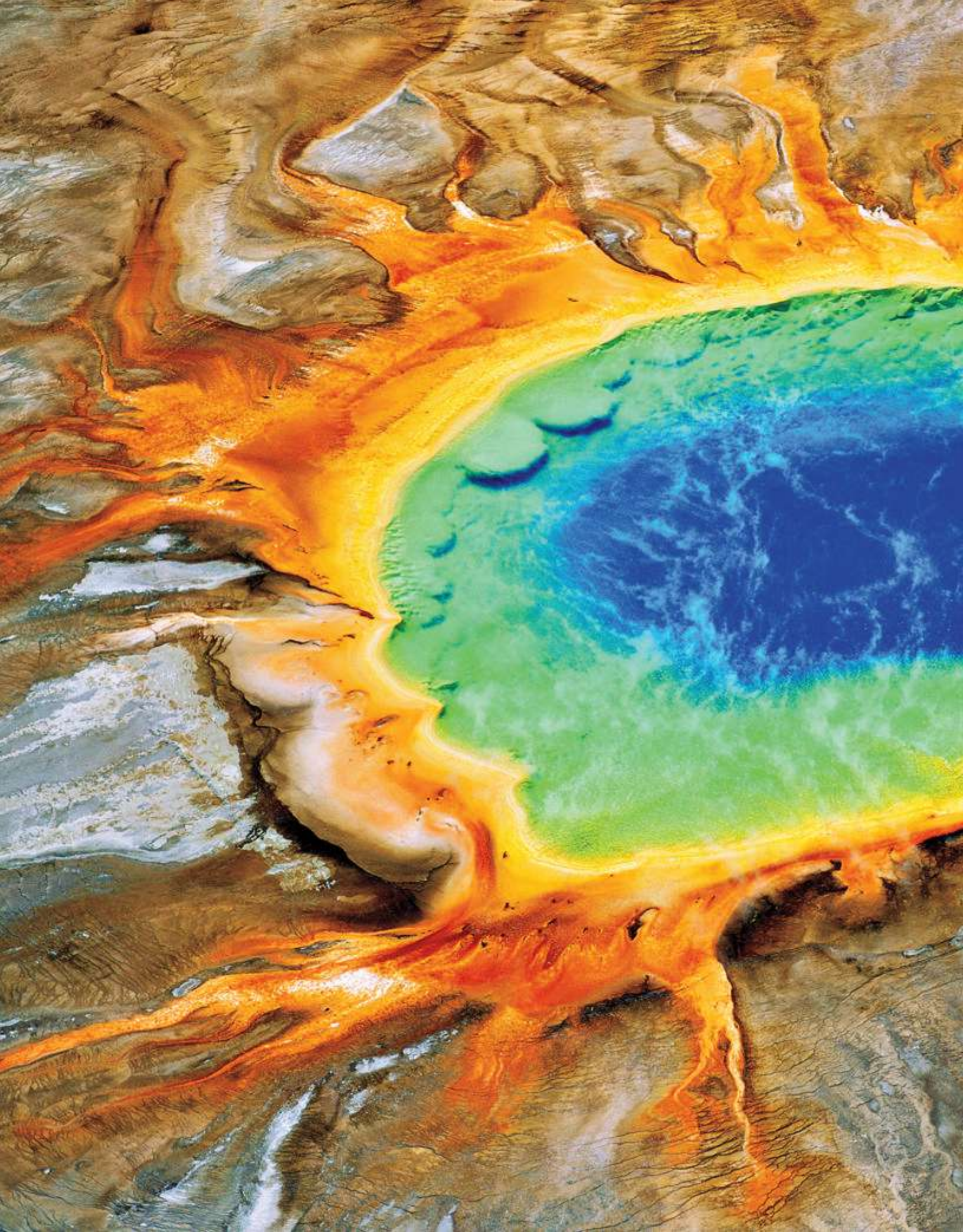


86 « the emerald lakes

TONGARIRO NATIONAL PARK, NEW ZEALAND

Ancient craters filled with water, the Emerald Lakes are part of the still active Mount Tongariro volcano (6,490 ft/1,978 m) and are colored by minerals leaching from the surrounding thermal areas. Hikers can view them on New Zealand's most popular day hike, the 12-mile (19.3 km) Tongariro Alpine Crossing.

The Emerald Lakes dot the landscape.





87 grand prismatic spring

YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK, WYOMING

The Grand Prismatic Spring is a watery, earthbound rainbow, a hot spring painted by nature in its most brilliant colors. Different microbes in the spring flourish at various temperatures and assume pigmentation appropriate to their environment. Temperatures at the center of the spring are too high to support bacteria in any numbers, so the blue is the blue of ordinary water and its selective absorption of visible light. The science may be prosaic—but the result is magical.

DON'T MISS

View the Grand Prismatic Falls on the easy Fairy Falls Trail (2.5 mi/4 km), a two- or three-hour round-trip from the trailhead on the park's Grand Loop Road. Take another hour to see Spray Geyser and Imperial Geyser beyond Fairy Falls.

An aerial view of the multicolored Grand Prismatic Spring, the largest hot spring in the United States





88 grand canyon national park

ARIZONA

Awestruck visitors stand at Mather Point, one of the most popular viewing spots on the vast rim of the Grand Canyon. They are specks against North America's greatest natural spectacle—in places 18 miles (29 km) across and 6,000 feet (1,800 m) deep. Their allotted span is a moment against the six million years the Colorado River has taken to carve the canyon, an even briefer flicker against the two billion years of geological time layered in the ancient shale, sandstone, and limestone of the canyon walls.

DON'T MISS

Sit at Toroweap Overlook and take in the view—the immense curve of the canyon, the silvery thread of the Colorado River 2,500 feet (760 m) below and the array of lava, cinder cones, and other volcanic features that make this lookout unique.

The dying rays of the sun light the walls of Wotan's Throne on the north rim of the Grand Canyon.





89 haleakala crater

MAUI, HAWAII

Lower down, the slopes of Haleakala are swathed in lush rain forest and loud with birdsong. Not here, close to the volcano's 10,023-foot (3,055 m) summit. Here, below the rim, in the vast bowl of Haleakala's "crater," there is only ash, dust, lava, and the sound of the wind—a "workshop of nature still cluttered with the raw beginnings of world building," in the words of writer Jack London, who in 1907 ventured into this rocky maw and its "jagged crests and spiracles of fantastic shape."

DON'T MISS

Haleakala's summit area is one of the best places in the world to view the night sky. Book a bed with the National Park Service in one of its three crater cabins and spend the night stargazing.

Horseback riders (right) trek down Sliding Sands Trail. The Haleakala silversword (above), is a distinctive local icon.







90 mojave desert

SOUTHWESTERN UNITED STATES

Far from the madding metropolitan crowds of Las Vegas and Los Angeles that surround it, the Mojave desert offers the balm of silence and solitude. Canyons, giant mesas, mountains, towering dunes, and vast, dust-dry plains make up one of North America's most elemental landscapes. It is a world little touched by humans, save for the odd crumbling mine or homestead, but one which nature adorns with the beauty of the Joshua tree and spring's brief-lived wildflowers.

DON'T MISS

Watch the sunset at Keys View on the crest of the Little San Bernardino Mountains in Joshua Tree National Park. Take in the incredible view across the desert heights to the Peninsular Ranges.

Joshua trees set against a glowing sunset make for one of the most recognizable symbols of the Mojave.



91 « northwest passage

CANADA

The Northwest Passage is not one place, nor one route, but a long-sought means of transit from the Atlantic to the Pacific through the labyrinth of icebound Arctic waterways of northern Canada. Retreating pack ice has made the route increasingly accessible, opening up an elemental world of tundra, mountains, and icy seas.

Melting ice paints patterns in the frozen seas of the Northwest Passage.

92 the pinnacles »

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Beyond the obvious agents of wind and rain, no one can agree on quite how the limestone pinnacles in Western Australia's Nambung National Park were created, but no one disputes their eerie beauty. Many of the region's 250,000 annual visitors come at dusk or dawn when the sun casts long shadows and the soft light brings out the pinnacles' sandy reds, yellows, and ochers to dazzling effect.

The Pinnacles limestone formations in Australia's Nambung National Park





93 « lava fields

OREGON

Oregon is one of North America's volcanic hot spots, dotted with volcanoes that have erupted and will almost certainly erupt again. Much of the region is scattered with the spectacular geological legacy of past eruptions, not least the great lava fields, buttes, and petrified forests near Bend in the Cascade Range.

Lava fields near Bend, Oregon, make up one of the many volcanic landscapes scattered across the state.



94
« simien national park
ETHIOPIA

It has been called Africa's Grand Canyon: a high and undulating plateau in Ethiopia's Simien Mountains that over millions of years has been massively eroded to form vast gorges, dizzying precipices, jagged peaks, and gigantic canyons that in places are 5,000 feet (1,500 m) deep.

The Simien Mountains in northern Ethiopia, Africa's "Grand Canyon," is also a World Heritage site.

95
lake baikal »
SIBERIA, RUSSIA

The sublimely beautiful Lake Baikal in southeast Siberia is a place of superlatives: It is the world's oldest (25 million years) and deepest (5,387 ft/1,642 m) lake. It is also one of the largest (12,248 sq mi/31,722 sq km) and contains an estimated 20 percent of the world's free-flowing fresh water. It has more than 1,000 plant and 1,500 animal species, 80 percent of them endemic.

A fisherman hauls nets on a horse-drawn sleigh over frozen Lake Baikal.

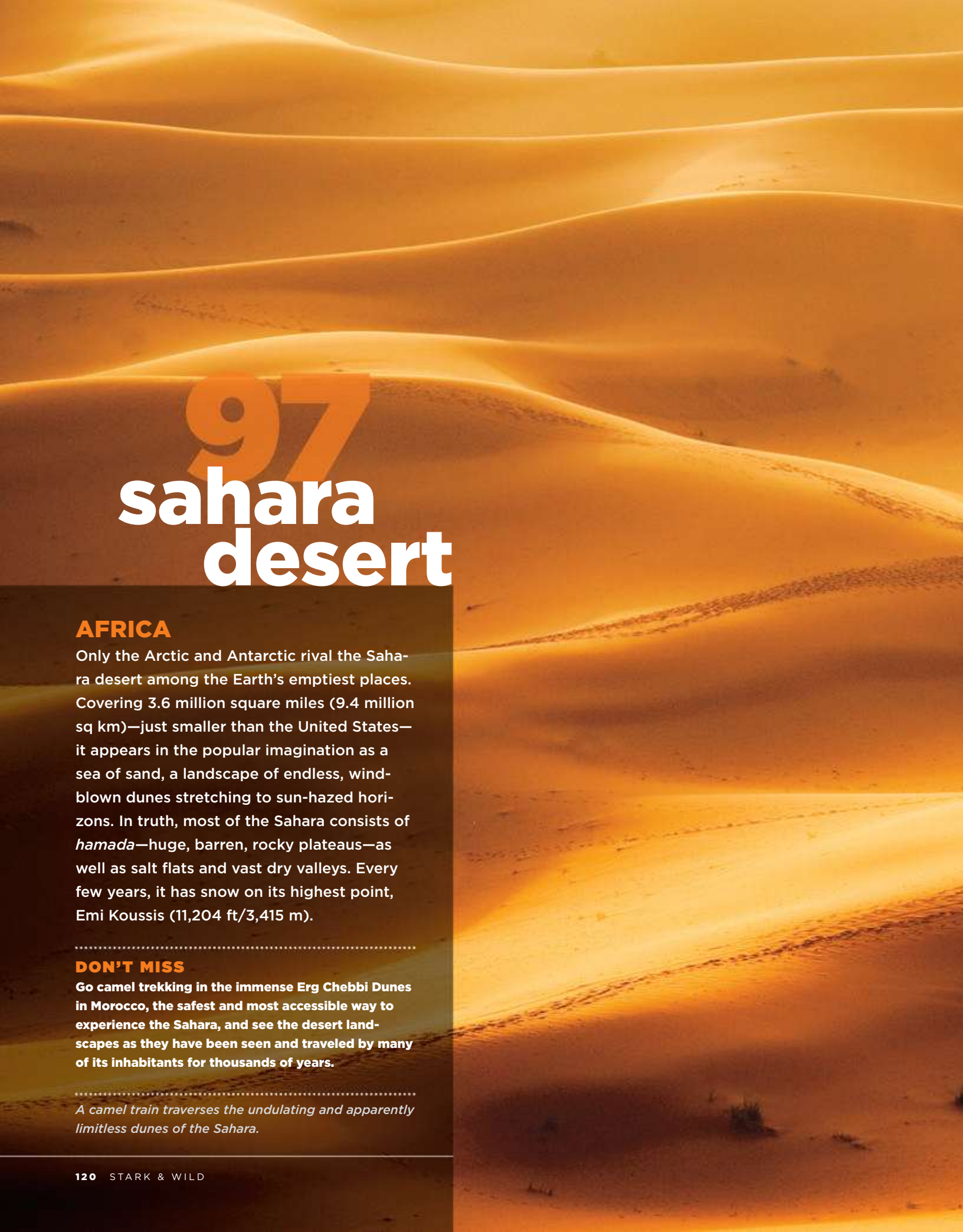




96
« socotra
YEMEN

Socotra, 220 miles (355 km) from the Yemen mainland, is among the world's most important centers of biodiversity, combining elements of Africa, Asia, and Europe in one tiny four-island archipelago. Its plants and animals have adapted to a range of landscapes, from the hot dry lowlands to the mist-shrouded granite peaks of the Hajhir Mountains at the islands' heart.

The strange dragon's blood tree is a feature of the Socotra archipelago.



97 sahara desert

AFRICA

Only the Arctic and Antarctic rival the Sahara desert among the Earth's emptiest places. Covering 3.6 million square miles (9.4 million sq km)—just smaller than the United States—it appears in the popular imagination as a sea of sand, a landscape of endless, wind-blown dunes stretching to sun-hazed horizons. In truth, most of the Sahara consists of *hamada*—huge, barren, rocky plateaus—as well as salt flats and vast dry valleys. Every few years, it has snow on its highest point, Emi Koussis (11,204 ft/3,415 m).

DON'T MISS

Go camel trekking in the immense Erg Chebbi Dunes in Morocco, the safest and most accessible way to experience the Sahara, and see the desert landscapes as they have been seen and traveled by many of its inhabitants for thousands of years.

A camel train traverses the undulating and apparently limitless dunes of the Sahara.







98 mineral forest

PAMUKKALE, TURKEY

Snow white, Arctic blue: the colors of Turkey's strangest landscape appear to belong in another climate. The white is not snow but calcium carbonate, deposited when mineral-laden water from a series of hot springs cools as it cascades through natural pools and overflows petrified terraces of travertine. The ancient Greeks and Romans swore by the pools' therapeutic properties and built temples, baths, and theaters on the site, the ruins of which add to the magic of a place the Turks call the "Cotton Castle."

DON'T MISS

Rise early before the tour groups arrive, put on a bathing suit, and soak in the shadow of Roman ruins in a natural pool at the top of the travertine terraces. Then walk down (no shoes allowed) through the pools of the "petrified forest."

Water from hot springs deposits calcium carbonate as it tumbles over outcrops in southwestern Turkey.





99 k2

KARAKORAM RANGE, PAKISTAN/CHINA

K2, said climber Fosco Maraini, is "all rock, ice, storm and abyss, all atoms and stars . . . with the nakedness of the world before the first human, or of the cindered planet after the last." No matter its humble name, coined by 19th-century British surveyors, and no matter that at 28,251 feet (8,611 m) it is the world's second highest peak, 778 feet (237 m) lower than Everest. With its classic, pyramidal profile and the grandeur of its immense rock walls, it yields to no mountain in its majesty.

DON'T MISS

Travel by helicopter over three days, following the route of a trek that normally takes 11 days, and then fly among the Karakoram's peaks, with direct views of K2 and the Baltoro Glacier, the world's second largest glacier outside the Poles.

K2 in the Himalaya is the world's second highest mountain, after Mount Everest.

100 the prairies

MIDWESTERN UNITED STATES

The prairies of the Midwest are one of the great mythic landscapes of America, a place whose wide skies seem to speak directly to the pioneering soul. “This was my country,” said writer and painter Georgia O’Keeffe, “terrible winds and a wonderful emptiness.” Today it remains an epic landscape that has the capacity to inspire—where change, said Walt Whitman, comes over us “like the stealthy perfume of wildflowers hidden in the grass.”

DON’T MISS

Visit Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve in Chase County, Kansas, at the heart of the Flint Hills to explore America’s last great swath of tall-grass prairie.

An early morning rainbow arcs over meadows of wild tall-grass prairie in the Flint Hills of Kansas.



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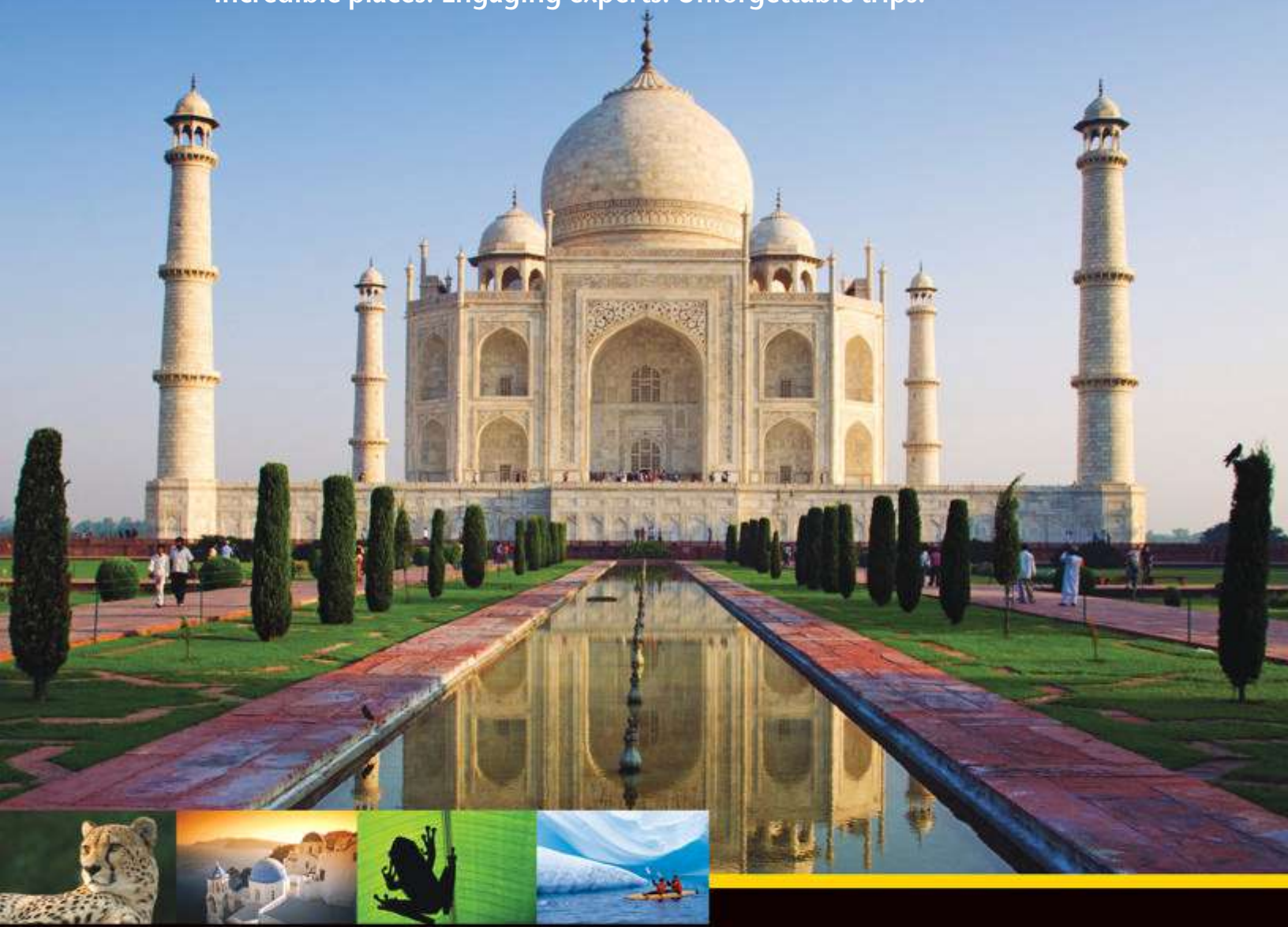
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